

What readers say about **House of Ghosts...**

“ **It’s been a long time since a fresh voice has brought such excitement to detective fiction.**

Do yourself a favor and pick up House Of Ghosts. I bet you won’t put it down!

— WALT
KUENSTLER

The author does not disappoint and the ending, as a great puzzle comes together, is brilliant and perfect... **This is a must read!**

— IRWIN
LEWIS, MD

This book is amazing. The characters are wonderful and the way they all fit together is surprising and very well written.

I highly recommend this book to everyone!

—
MICHELLE
A. KAPLAN

House Of Ghosts is a compelling story

I recommend to anyone interested in Jewish history, or great mystery stories.

— K. G.
MORRIS,
PHD

The book just drew me in, page by page, until I really couldn't put it down."

—
ELEANOR
BOBROW,
WDIY
PUBLIC
RADIO”

House of Ghosts

A NOVEL BY
LAWRENCE KAPLAN

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Dedication

For
IRENE LEDERER,
eyewitness to
American bombers
flying over Auschwitz.

Chapter 1

WESTFIELD, NJ AUGUST 2000

JOSEPH ARTHUR HENDERSON limped into the kitchen of the tomb-quiet center hall colonial. It was near noon. He wouldn't have forced himself off the couch in the den if it weren't for the sledgehammer pounding his skull right behind the eyes. The couch had taken the place of his bed, using the stairs to the second floor killed his leg as the rationale, but had none for turning off the phones or closing the blinds during the day.

The renovated workspace was the product of the trembling hands searching through the "junk" drawer next to the stove. The headaches weren't new. This one was worse than the others. Joe was sure the envelope with the last of the Percocet was in a plastic sugar bowl he brought back from Disney World when Emily was six. He guarded the two tablets as if they were the keys to eternal bliss, to be used for an emergency when the pain management specialist wouldn't authorize more refills. The bastard said he'd have to learn to deal with it, and with the rehabilitation program the leg would get better. It didn't and he stopped going.

With the help of a couple of buddies in the Department, the tired sixty-year old dwelling was ripped up a room at a time. A cop and his teacher wife never could have purchased a house in the exclusive Wychwood section of town if the place wasn't one step away from being condemned.

With a hundred thousand dollars won in the lottery and the profit made from the sale of their starter Cape on the other side of town, the nervous couple signed the purchase agreement. "It's a great deal and it's the northside of Westfield," the shark real estate agent told her prey as she tried to justify the obscene price. "The northside always commands the dollars." The small New Jersey town, twenty-six miles south of Manhattan and an

easy commute across the Hudson River to the caverns of Wall Street, had exploded with the NASDAQ made, pie-in-the-sky money of the 1990s. Yuppies overpaid for the right to tear down existing structures to build their McMansions.

Rosa *must have* moved it. With his heart racing, Joe opened the cabinet where the glasses were kept. Mickey's face smirked back. He felt the coin envelope for his salvation, popped one of the white tablets into his mouth and chewed it as a piece of candy. Gagging on the acid chunks, he took a swig of coffee brewed the previous morning from a mug emblazoned with University of Arizona. The curdled cream added to the putrid taste occupying his mouth. He poured the remnants of the mug into the sink and shook his head, watching the thick goo seep between the rubber nibs of the garbage disposal. The symbolism was clear—his life was sliding down the drain and he didn't give a damn.

At forty-nine, things were supposed to be different. The kid was going off to college and the time alone with Elaine, unencumbered with the demands of a hormone raging teenager, would provide the zip to rekindle a flagging relationship. He needed a couple more years with the Westfield P.D. and then he'd tell his chief of police to go to hell. At twenty-five years, his rank of detective lieutenant would provide enough for a comfortable retirement. It would be their time for some fun.

Then a bullet blew away bone and muscle a few inches below his right knee. Surgeons contemplated amputation before agreeing to reconstruction using titanium rods and a new vascular procedure to restore blood flow. The surgery left him with a permanent disability, incessant pain, and a wife who didn't understand how he *ever* got involved with the FBI in their attempt to catch a homicidal maniac.

Joe crossed the ten by ten space avoiding a stained glass Tiffany lamp swaged from the ceiling and settled into a white upholstered captain's chair. He propped his leg on a footstool kept in the kitchen for that purpose.

Resting his head against the wall, he waited for the Class II narcotic to take effect. Dr. Headcase, the psychologist his wife forced him to see, said he had traumatic stress disorder. Zoloft would help the depression. Joe laughed at hearing the diagnosis. Getting shot wasn't anything he hadn't experienced before. The Yale Ph.D. blanched when Joe showed him the

scar on his chest from a Vietcong's AK-47 round. Joe, in his own estimation, was a complete screw up pure and simple.

A mad dash of scrambling thuds ricocheted down the staircase from the second floor. Roxy, Joe's black Labrador, scratched at the front door.

"*Ho-la! Ho-la!*" sang out. Rosa, the Henderson's long employed Puerto Rican cleaning lady, had let herself in. Roxy danced in circles as Rosa gave her a squeeze around her ample neck. "Joe, you home?"

"In the kitchen," he moaned, realizing it was Friday.

Rosa, petite and owning skin the color of virgin olive oil, walked into the kitchen. Her white T-shirt and pink floral shorts were wet with perspiration. "It so hot." She wiped her face with a tissue. "Fifteen days of ninety plus."

Joe was unfazed: the central air was humming and the fridge was stocked with Budweiser. He hadn't ventured outdoors for two days.

Roxy rambled to the kitchen's threshold and gave Joe a look of disgust. The ninety-pound canine was lucky—Joe, in a burst of genius, installed a doggy door in the laundry room that opened to a fenced yard and purchased an automatic feed dispenser programmed for three times a day. She wagged her tail at Rosa, then scampered out of the room.

"A dog needs to be loved." With her hands on her hips, she looked at the man who had employed her for eighteen years following the birth of Emily. Her role as full-time housekeeper/nanny evolved as Emily grew. She still came twice a week—Mondays and Fridays—but didn't see the reason why. For over a year, Joe had lived in the house alone.

Joe's orange golf shirt and blue jeans were stained with coffee. With a three-day growth of stubble, the one time fashion plate passed as one of the homeless that hung out at the train station. "Bad nights?" she asked.

"You don't have to be polite," Joe said without opening his eyes. "I've got a hangover the size of San Juan."

Rosa didn't require any explanation. A dozen twenty-ounce empty beer cans and a half bottle of Johnny Walker Black sat on the table. The bottle of Johnny Walker was unopened on her last visit. "Elaine call?" Rosa asked, knowing how her phone calls pushed Joe into that "dark place."

"I had the pleasure of hearing her voice Monday night. She found a job, an apartment, and a new life," he said with a wry smile.

When Elaine announced at the end of June of the previous year she was taking a sabbatical from her teaching job to work with mentally challenged

kids on an Arizona Indian reservation, Joe was unashamedly relieved. Their marriage was in shambles. Maybe it was his never-ending funk. Maybe it was the beer and brown goods chasers. The Marlboro man and the overflowing ashtrays didn't help. Besides, Emily was entering the University of Arizona as a freshman and needed to get her things out west. Elaine said she'd be away for ten months and hoped that he would use the time to figure out what he was going to do with the rest of his life.

"I'm sorry for you," Rosa said.

Joe removed a cigarette from a pack of Marlboros on the table, lighting it with a Zippo bought in a PX before shipping out to Vietnam. A wisp of smoke floated from a nostril. "It's alright. Elaine is being Elaine."

Rosa scooped up the beer cans and disappeared into the laundry room. The crash of the cans into the recycling container pierced Joe's ears. She returned pushing a vacuum cleaner. "Forgot to tell you, something is happening at Mr. Swedge."

Joe wrinkled his forehead, picked up his cane fashioned out of a five-iron golf club he was no longer able to swing, and forced the pack of cigarettes into the right front pocket of his Levi's. He hobbled to the picture window in living room at the front of the house.

In the circular driveway of the Tudor across the street were an ambulance, a Westfield black and white police cruiser, and a dark blue Crown Victoria. A banana yellow Dodge Durango SUV completed the quartet.

Joe didn't need to rush. The Durango belonged to Dr. Christian Murphy of the Union county medical examiner's office. Barefoot, he put on a pair of sneakers that were wedged under the base of a wood coat rack beside the door and ventured out.

Rosa was wrong. It wasn't so hot; it was as if he stepped into a blast furnace. Joe felt the heat rising from the concrete walk.

"Hey Joe!" Ed Stoval yelled from the front yard two doors to the left of the action. The octogenarian rested against the handle of a bamboo rake he was wielding against a mountain of grass clippings. "What's going on?"

Joe crossed the street feeling the curious stares from windows up and down the block. Tanglewood Lane wasn't where invitations were extended to come over for a cup of coffee. Stoval was one of the exceptions, the

other, a raven-haired beauty with legs that went forever and had a husband who was never home. “Mr. Swedge must not be feeling well.”

A Jaguar convertible coupe backed out of the driveway from one of the recently constructed houses, slowing to a crawl as it approached Joe. “Prick,” Joe mumbled, wanting to knock the three hundred dollar designer aviator sunglasses off the pompous ass’s head. The thirty-something male accelerated, tossing loose gravel behind.

Stoval coughed deeply, spitting a gob of mucous onto the pile. “I hope he’s fucking dead.” His ramrod carriage hadn’t changed from when he served in World War II. Silver and Bronze Stars and two Purple Hearts gave him cause to curse the abundant BMWs and Mercedes’ that cruised the upscale town. A 1990 Buick LeSabre sat proudly in his driveway.

Before Joe could answer, Stoval adjusted his 82nd Airborne Veteran’s cap and turned away. Joe laughed to himself. Stoval wasn’t prone to cursing, but Preston Swedge, with a disposition as sweet as rancid butter, brought out the best in everyone.

Joe approached the black and white from the rear. The uniformed officer sat with his hat pulled down over his eyes. A rivulet of condensation from the air conditioner ran down a slope toward a grove of evergreens partially obscuring the house. Joe tapped the bumper with the golf club causing the dozing officer to sit up and check the side mirrors. The driver’s door creaked open.

“Where in hell have you been?” Sgt. Bill Fielder asked, placing his feet on the pavement. The middle-aged patrolman looked up at the five ten former lieutenant. They were friends for twenty years and Joe’s change in appearance was disturbing. The combination of Joe’s packing on thirty plus pounds and the red spidery look of his face led to one conclusion: the man had fallen into the bottle. Fielder knew his share of cops that ended up the same way. “I call and get no answer and ringing the bell is a waste of time.”

Joe looked away as he took the last drag on the Marlboro, tossing the butt onto the street. “I took off for a couple of weeks and visited my cousin up in... Maine.”

“I got a couple of long lost relatives somewhere. Maybe I should look them up.” Fielder never heard Joe mention a cousin in Maine. He changed the subject. “Jeanie would love to have you over for dinner. It ain’t good to be alone.”

“I’ll give you a call.” Joe ran his fingers through his graying crew cut. He thumbed in the direction of the house. “How good?”

“About the same as when we found that scientist and his buddy dead last summer with the heat turned to the max.” Fielder fetched a red handkerchief crammed in a rear pocket with his ticket book and blew his nose. “I needed some air.”

That incident was the precursor to Joe being shot. The memory of the decomposed bodies churned an unsteady stomach not helped by the Percocet. He struggled to remove the pack of Marlboros from the tight jeans. “I hate shit like this. Who called?” He lit another cigarette.

“Ryan Mack couldn’t get any more mail through the slot,” Fielder replied, taking a drink from a bottle of water. “We’ve been ventilating the place for an hour, but...” Fielder got back into the air-conditioned cruiser and rolled the window down. “The body is in the kitchen. Straight down the hall.”

Joe didn’t need directions. The floor plan was burned into his brain after searching the premises on more than two-dozen calls for burglars, second story men, bumps in the night, and a character named Rothstein who seemed to be connected to the Wild Turkey the proprietor of the premises liked to suck down. When Joe suggested adopting a Doberman from the ASPCA, the irate citizen threw him off the property. The two hadn’t exchanged even a drop dead in a year.

A sign declared the premises were protected 24/7 by a security firm advertised across the country. He laughed at the idea that the renowned skinflint would’ve sprung for anything more sophisticated than a piece of string to trip an intruder. The sign was a two dollar knockoff at any flea market.

Climbing the slight incline, Joe passed behind the evergreens and stood facing the house. Rough sawn limestone and red brick combining with semi hexagonal bays, turrets, and half-timbering gave the impression of a fortress.

Joe maneuvered around a section of deteriorating flagstone walkway leading to the ground level entrance. He flicked his cigarette into a neglected flowerbed and stepped across the marble threshold of the open gingerbread door. The aroma wasn’t too bad. He wasn’t surprised that a

security keypad, motions sensors, and window glass breaks were nowhere in sight. A pile of mail lay on the floor adjacent to the slot.

When Swedge tossed Joe from the premises, he fired Rosa as his housecleaner. It was apparent that a replacement hadn't been found. Spider webs dangled from the huge crystal chandelier suspended from the vaulted ceiling. Dust thick enough to write his name in covered the banister of the staircase to the second floor. Sheets covered the furniture in the living and dining rooms to his immediate left.

Green horseflies danced around brass wall sconces in the dimly lit the hallway. With each step, the mild aroma turned more sickeningly sweet with the flies growing thick on the crown moldings. Joe tapped on the door jamb with the club and entered the kitchen, drawing four faces covered with surgical masks his way. A six-panel glass door to the rear yard was open.

"A regular Yogi Bear. He sleeps till noon..." Lt. Dan Fredericks gibed, handing Joe a mask.

"One of the perks of retirement," Joe replied, not taking the bait. Fredericks, promoted to head the five man detective division upon Joe's retirement, was a born-again Bible reader who listed Joe as one of his projects. In his black suit, starched white shirt, and pencil thin red tie, the thirty-four year old looked like a cross between Buddy Holly and Billy Graham.

"Nice to see you Joe," Dr. Christian Murphy said as he jotted notes on a clipboard.

Chris Murphy was Joe's kind of guy—nicotine addicted and never missed an occasion to hoist a cold one. Murphy never changed the happy-go-lucky expression on his pudgy freckled face or the lab coat Joe claimed was a biohazard. "Glad to see that someone knows his manners."

"Not much of a mystery," Murphy said, pointing to the Parson's table. A collection of pill bottles lay scattered amidst a leather bound book and two weeks worth of crossword puzzles clipped from *The New York Times*. "Mr. Swedge was being treated for congestive heart failure. The tablets on the floor are nitroglycerin. I'll have a definite cause of death in a couple of days."

Joe checked two EMTs fidgeting with a black rubber body bag. Preston Swedge, leaning back in a wood high back chair with his chin tilted to the ceiling in a forty-five degree angle, had turned into a science experiment.

Maggots working overtime stripped the flesh off his face and consumed his eyeballs, leaving sockets glistening like polished ivory. A noxious collection of yellow-green fluids congealed on Preston's wing tips. "Like the Wicked Witch of the East, he's melted into his shoes. How long hasn't he been missed?"

"Ten to twelve days. Humidity and heat play havoc with the decomposition process." Murphy pointed to the flies on Swedge's face. "Do you want to know the life cycle of our friend the *Chlorotabanus crepuscularis*?"

"I'll wait for the movie," Joe replied. "Where's the emergency alert pendent he wore around his neck?"

"The last completed puzzle is from the fifth. The date fits within the estimate." Fredericks removed the pendent from a plastic bag on the kitchen counter, holding it in the palm of his rubber gloved hand. "Didn't help him."

Joe shrugged his shoulders.

"Can you *remember* the last time you saw Mr. Swedge alive?" Fredericks asked.

Joe lit a cigarette and froze Fredericks with his glare. Joe's former shrinking violet subordinate had grown into the role of being the big cheese. Murphy sorted through his notes as he walked to the door to stay out of the looming fray. "I remember like it was last Thursday. I saw him tool out in his '58 Fairlane convertible," Joe said. A half-eaten hoagie lay rotting on its wax paper wrapper across from the body. He circled the table and sat down. "Looks like tuna."

Fredericks nodded to the EMTs who lowered the bloated remains into the bag positioned on a stretcher. "So what?" Fredericks asked.

Joe waved at a swarm of flies tiptoeing across the hoagie. "He couldn't chew stuff like this."

Fredericks removed his mask. "What's your point?"

"Someone was here when Preston expired." Joe leaned forward for a closer look. "A month ago, I was at the dentist and Mr. Charm was bitching to the receptionist how his new set of choppers couldn't chew oatmeal no less a sandwich."

Murphy packed his examination bag. "This is all very interesting. But..."

“Make sure you check his gut. I’ll bet a case of beer you won’t find any shredded lettuce,” Joe said.

“I’ll let you know,” Murphy said, rolling his eyes. “It’s been a real pleasure.”

Fredericks watched Murphy recede down the hall. “There’s no evidence of forced entry, the drawers and closets haven’t been tossed. According to Murphy, the guy was taking medication to keep his heart ticking. Maybe he was sitting on the other side of the table, didn’t feel well, got up and tried to walk it off. Who knows?”

“And who cares?” Joe added. “I don’t give a shit, but let me ask you one question, Detective Lieutenant.”

Fredericks motioned for Joe to continue.

“He goes for a leisurely stroll around the table and he doesn’t use the alert. He feared dying and being found like he was.” Joe laughed as he pat Fredericks on the shoulder. “Like I said, I don’t give a shit. It’s your case, but for old times, humor me and check the wax paper for prints.” His eyes widened as he flipped the book over. *The Five Books of Moses* was embossed in silver letters.

Fredericks removed his gloves. “I’ll think about it.”

Joe picked up the book, opening the cover. “The Old Testament.” He shook his head. “Genesis. In a million years, I’d never guess he’d be reading the Jewish bible.” He checked his watch. It was 1:15. “I gotta get going. I got a shrink appointment in hour.” He tapped the table twice with his club and walked down the hall into the sunshine.

Fielder was gone. Joe Stoval, clutching his rake, stood at the bottom of the driveway. “You got your wish, Preston is *fucking* dead,” Joe said.

“I shouldn’t have said it. Barbara would’ve kicked me in the shin.”

Joe put his arm around Stoval’s neck. “If I had a ten dollar bill for every time I wished the bastard dead...it would’ve paid for a year of college.”

Stovall burst out laughing. “Maybe the ‘fucking Jew’ Rothstein killed him. He rambled on about him enough.”

Joe lit another Marlboro. “I was hoping to meet the ghost Rothstein.” He blew a stream of smoke to the sky. “I wonder if there’s going to be a service. Preston had no relatives.”

Stoval poked at a rock with his rake. “I hope there is one. I can’t wait to hear Reverend Miller’s eulogy for the man who claimed he changed the

world and history.”

“Changed the world, how?” Joe asked.

Ed shrugged his shoulders. “Beats me. Maybe it was the booze talking.”

Chapter 2

WESTFIELD, NJ AUGUST 2000

JOE CHECKED THE SIDE MIRROR, stuck his hand through the window and gave the guy in the BMW on his bumper the middle finger. “Keep blowing your horn, moron.” There wasn’t any way to pull around the old lady pushing a shopping cart in the middle of the parking lot of Wholesome Organics. Going organic for Joe was equivalent to flushing money down the toilet. Besides, the T-bone steak he planned to toss on the grill was on sale; it would be a change from frozen dinners, fast food and pizza he was surviving on since his wife left.

Driving Elaine’s ‘98 Volvo wagon was an adventure. He swore to the service manager at the dealership that turning the radio on caused the Swedish delight to misfire. Using the air-conditioner caused it to stall. Joe cursed the woman who took his five-year-old Explorer to Arizona as he turned the key for the umpteenth time. The engine coughed to life. He revved the oil-belching beast for another ten seconds for the prick in the BMW. Dr. Headcase would’ve been pleased. The behavior modification plan for his anger management issues paid its first dividend.

Fredericks’ Crown Victoria was back in the Swedge driveway. Joe stopped ten feet past the evergreens to get an angle to see the front door. A van belonging to Callahan Restoration, Inc. was parked with its sliding door on the passenger side facing the entrance. Ryan Callahan was a cousin of Christian Murphy. His business was removing the stench of death. Someone wasn’t wasting time. Joe wondered how long it would be until the Tudor was on the market.

Joe pulled the Volvo into the garage and carried the shopping bag through the door to the laundry room. Roxy pointed her nose in the direction of

Angus heaven. "Patience girl," Joe said, walking into the kitchen. He placed the bag on the counter.

The answer machine was blinking. Joe hit the play button. Call one: "It's Elaine. I hope you remember to go to your appointment." He hit the delete button. Call two: "Jozef, Harry is away for next three days. Call me, please." Joe laughed as he hit delete. The sultry voice, requiring no introduction, belonged to Alenia from down the block. The ex-pole dancer found her mark at a strip joint near the Elizabeth exit of the New Jersey Turnpike. She massaged the ego and other worldly parts of a man thirty years her senior, liberated his wallet and found a very comfortable life a world away from the dingy apartment in a suburb of Moscow. He'd let her wait. Call three: "Christian Murphy." Joe turned up the volume. "Preston Swedge had a heart the size of a basketball with advanced coronary artery disease. I'm listing the cause of death as heart failure. That's one for me. The other is for you. There wasn't any lettuce in his gut."

Joe opened the refrigerator door of the Maytag side-by-side, grabbed a can of Bud, and held it to his forehead. He limped into the den off the dining room. Joe scoffed at the description of the seven by ten room when they bought the house. A den in his mind was large enough to hold a pool table, an oversized leather recliner, and a monster projection television. The converted sewing room barely held a six-foot couch and a screw-it-together computer desk purchased at a bigbox wholesale club out on the highway. A thirteen-inch Sony rested on the corner of the desk.

Joe raised the blinds on the two windows behind the desk and sat on a Banker's chair his father polished for thirty years as a N.Y.P.D. detective. A photo of Joe, his father, and grandfather in their N.Y.P.D. blues taken at Joe's graduation from the police academy teetered on the edge of the desk. He booted up his notebook computer, clicking on the bookmarked site for Rutgers University.

"Hey Joe, where are you?" Dan Fredericks yelled.

Roxy bolted through her doggie door, running full tilt into Fredericks as he neared the kitchen. "Good to see you girl."

"Grab a beer in the 'fridge," Joe yelled. "I'm in the den."

Fredericks entered the den sans jacket and tie. His shirt was soaked with perspiration. Popping the tab on a beer, he collapsed on the couch. "The air-conditioning feels great."

“I sorta like the smell of rotting flesh,” Joe said, holding his nose. “I should’ve saved some of the maggots for bait.”

Roxy pawed at Fredericks’ pant pocket where M&Ms were always in supply. He reached into the bag, giving her one. “I didn’t know you fished.”

“I’m thinking about taking it up.” Joe got a kick from goofing on Fredericks. “Murphy’s cousin doesn’t waste anytime. Who called him?”

Fredericks shifted on the couch. “Swedge must have known he was short on time. On the refrigerator were instructions to follow in the event of his death. I contacted his attorney and told him the facts. He asked if I knew someone who could clean up the mess.”

“Who’s the asshole?” Joe asked as he pounded the keyboard.

“Lester Hargrove.”

Joe stopped typing. “Never heard of him.”

Fredericks got off the couch to look over Joe’s shoulder. “Going back to school?”

Joe returned to typing. “I took an aptitude test and you know what I’m good for?” he asked as he filled out an online registration.

“Beer taster?” Fredericks guessed.

“Close. Customer service.”

“In a maximum security prison?” Fredericks laughed.

“Precisely. I told my shrink that I’ve been thinking about finishing my requirements for a master’s degree in history. He said go for it, but take it slow. He’s afraid I might crack under the pressure.” Joe said, waiting for the next information screen. “Did you check out the emergency alert?”

“It doesn’t work. I called the service. They don’t get a signal when it’s activated.”

“Preston oughta sue them posthumously. I’m sure Hargrove would take the case for thirty percent,” Joe quipped.

Fredericks nervously played with the tab on the can until it broke free. “I checked the wax paper for prints.” He walked over to what Joe’s daughter tabbed, The Wall of Honor: A 10 x 10 of Joe shaking hands with John Walsh, the host of *America’s Most Wanted*; Joe’s honorable discharge from the Marine Corps with his Purple Heart; and a plastic case with two crushed, quarter-size metal pieces, remains of the hollow point bullets that shattered his right leg. The case was mounted above a letter of appreciation from the U.S. Attorney General, for aiding in the elimination of the

homicidal maniac who fired them. Two floor-to-ceiling bookcases, holding military books detailing the campaigns of the Civil War, World Wars I and II, and Joe's personal hell—the year he served in Vietnam.

Stalling, Fredericks pointed to the photo of Joe with John Walsh. "I never understood why I wasn't in the picture. I was the guy who List was handcuffed to when we brought him back from Virginia."

John List, a Westfield resident, gained national media attention by murdering his wife, mother in-law, and three kids in 1971. List, a God-fearing Sunday school teacher, was caught up in a failing marriage, a failing career, a mountain of debt, and kids perceived to be on the wrong side of the Good Book. For nearly eighteen years, List lived a life of lies until he was apprehended with the help of the TV show.

Joe completed the registration form and clicked the "finish" icon. He turned the chair toward Fredericks. "The case was ice cold. I convinced Walsh to put List's face on the show," he lectured. "Cheer up. If you're lucky, a homicidal maniac will kill five or six poor slob on your watch and provide the reason for you to call Walsh."

Roxy sat at Fredericks' feet waiting for more M&Ms. Fredericks abruptly stood. "Fuck you."

Joe finished his beer. He fished through the desk's pencil drawer, found a Marlboro and passed the cigarette under his nose. "Stale but serviceable." He flicked the Zippo. Smoke rose to the ceiling. "What about the prints on the wax paper?"

"Most were too smudged to be of any value. There's a thumbprint that is identifiable—Elmer the sandwich guy at Duke's Deli. He served three years for drug possession; been clean for ten years.

"He's a good guy." Joe leaned back in the chair. "You got something else?"

"I'm getting heat to wrap this up. Swedge's attorney packs a lot of weight. We're not going to look for the identity of the sandwich eater."

Joe knocked the cigarette inside a coffee can that he used as an ashtray. He rubbed the back of his head. "Why am I not surprised?" The phone rang. The caller ID said Pole Dancer. He pointed toward the door. "I've got to take this call."

Chapter 3

WESTFIELD, NJ AUGUST 2000

RESTING AGAINST AN OAK, Joe drained a can of Bud. It felt good to be outside like he used to do every Thursday, his day to hit the links from April through the first snowy winter day. Running a hand over the grip of the five-iron nestled in the manicured grass, Joe fought the urge to take a hack at the lone dandelion that managed to evade an army of landscapers on the payroll of Fairview Cemetery.

Taking a hit on his tenth Marlboro of the day, brought a strange pain underneath his breast bone like sandpaper on sandpaper. Elaine never lost an opportunity to predict that he would end up like Uncle Ernie on an oxygen tank after losing a lung. Maybe she was right when she suggested he purchase a plot—it was only a matter of time and he ought to choose the spot.

Joe coughed up a plug of nicotine infused mucous, spitting it toward a primrose patch. He checked his watch—ten o'clock. Dr. Headcase would be proud. He hadn't seen the rising sun in a year. He'd been on the hill since eight for one reason: Until he saw the dirt flooding over Preston Swedge, it wasn't over.

Ed Stoval said that Preston's attorney came by to pick up one of Preston's suits. The arrangements were private. Joe laughed at the idea—nothing was private. Catman Prather, an ex-con Joe helped get a job at Holly's Home for Funerals, had given him the heads up the day before that Preston's body was being released by the medical examiner. The burial had to be done on the quick, before eleven the next day. Catman didn't know why. The caretaker at Fairview bitched and moaned he wouldn't have the gravesite

prepared. A promised C-note assured a backhoe would be digging by eight in the Oakdale section.

Joe reached into his goodie bag, retrieved an opened bag of Cheese Doodles, and popped a handful into his mouth. After muscling a canopy over the plot to keep the grieving family out of the blazing sun, two gravediggers tidied the work area, covering the excavated earth with a green tarpaulin. Joe snapped open the front page of *The Star Ledger*. The lead article—"Vice President Al Gore told reporters during a press conference before boarding his plane at Edwards Air Force Base that he had not ruled out the possibility of including Ralph Nader or other third party candidates in the upcoming presidential debates." Joe had one comment, "The schmucks deserve each other."

He flipped the paper to the death notices, a habit he claimed he inherited from his mother. Dr. Headcase said it was a manifestation of an unconscious need to be assured that one was still alive. Joe knew the psychobabble was bullshit. He was looking for names of those he consciously wanted dead.

Surveying the one hundred ten acres produced a shiver even though the temperature hovered near eighty. He never bought into the line of the dearly departed going to a better place, not believing it when they lowered his cancer riddled grandmother into the hole when he was six or when his best buddy from his Marine unit decided to ventilate the side of his head. It didn't matter that the poor devil never made it as a civilian, stumbling from one job to another with stops along the way in psyche units and county jails. Once in *that* box you were finished, kaput, bye-bye, worm meal. Spending twenty grand on a polished granite mausoleum with stained glass windows made perfect sense.

A hearse followed by a gray Camry turned onto Oakdale Avenue. The procession stopped twenty yards from the gravesite. A frail elderly man of average height, who Joe identified as Reverend James Miller, got out of the front passenger seat.

The sight of the six-three, gray bearded rabbi from the Westfield temple, Bernard Balaban, unfolding from behind the wheel brought Joe to his feet and squished his plan of watching the proceedings from the hill. Preston's protesting the placing of the Jewish holidays on the school calendar at a board of education meeting was legendary. "The fucking Jew Rothstein"

still rang in his ears. Joe looked around. "Lillie, you're not going to miss these," he said, lifting a flowerpot of petunias from the grave of Lillie Pfaphenbach deceased since 1975. Putting on an oversized pair of sunglasses, he adjusted his Yankee cap to just over his eyes and began descending the hill.

An attendant from Holly's Home for Funerals transferred a burnished walnut casket to a gurney. The man of the hour was wheeled to the entrance of his freshly dug subterranean condo where the two cemetery workers placed the casket onto the lowering device.

Joe circled the section, approaching from the far side. Miller's voice carried in the slight breeze, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want..." Joe placed the flowers at the base of a tombstone fifteen feet from Balaban and Miller.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever," Miller concluded.

Balaban took a step closer to the grave. "*Yeetgadal v' yeetkodash sh'mey rabbah. B'almah dee v'rah kheer'utey. V' yamleekh malkhutei, b'chahyeykhohn, uv' yohmeykhohn. uv'chahyei d'chohl beyt yisrael, ba'agalah u'veez'man kareev, v'eemru Amein.*"

"Amen," Miller said.

Joe said a silent "Amen" recognizing the classic Hebrew mourner's prayer for the dead. He took a step closer.

Balaban continued, "May His great Name grow exalted and sanctified in the world that He created as He willed. May He give reign to His kingship in your lifetimes and in your days, and in the lifetimes of the entire Family of Israel, swiftly and soon."

Straddling the coffin, one of the gravediggers released the lowering device. The casket slowly descended out of sight. The other worker removed the tarpaulin from the mound, handing each clergyman a long handled shovel.

Both clergymen stepped to the mound, removing a spade's load. "May you finally rest in peace," Miller said, sending the dirt onto the coffin. For an instant, he locked eyes with Joe.

Balaban bowed his head before delivering the full scoop with a thud. "Goodbye my tormented friend." He turned, re-burying the spade into the mound.

“Say a prayer for him at the Wailing Wall,” Miller said to Balaban, handing the shovel back to the workman. “And throw in one for me.”

“Good things happen to good people,” Balaban said, placing an arm around Miller’s shoulder. “You’ll be okay.”

Joe lit a Marlboro. Watching the Camry pull away, he ambled over to the gravesite. The workmen had removed both the lowering device and the canopy. “The service is over,” came gruffly from the backhoe over the rumble of the diesel engine,

“Yeah, got here late,” Joe yelled, walking to the mound of earth. “Do you mind?” he asked, removing one of the shovels.

“Knock yourself out!” came back with a rev of the engine.

Joe, holding the full shovel, looked into the grave. “Preston, what the hell went on here today?”

Chapter 4

WESTFIELD, NJ SEPTEMBER 2000

GEOPOLITICAL SYSTEMS 1945–1955 wasn't high drama, but Joe managed to keep awake in class and stay current with the work. He was mired in writing a twenty-page paper due at the end of the week. Saturdays were supposed to be relaxing. He needed a break.

Joe put on his Westfield P.D. windbreaker and picked up his five-iron. Ripping August from the calendar tore the heart out of summer. It had turned cooler. With the light drizzle, it felt as if it was fall. An estate sale was in its final day at the Swedge house. Joe heard the house was sold to a "nice" couple who were going to level it and build their dream castle. He wasn't surprised. Proceeds from the sale were to go to an un-named charity.

Lighting a cigarette, Joe walked to the curb. *What was it that drew the bargain hunters?* A statuesque blonde in designer jeans was loading pots and pans not worthy of the Salvation Army into trunk of a \$90,000 BMW 750.

Ed Stoval wasn't wielding his rake. He had gone to his daughter in Chicago to avoid the tumult. Despite his outward giddiness at Preston's demise, Joe sensed a deep-seated sadness. It was the end of an era.

Joe crossed the street. Four silver helium balloons tattooed with "Sale Today" were tethered to a lime green *Attic Finds* sandwich board positioned on the driveway apron. Poking at the bobbing targets with the five-iron drew a dirty look from a gray haired gentleman walking toward him. Joe waggled his fingers under his chin as they passed.

A garbage dumpster piled with cardboard boxes, black plastic trash bags, an upright freezer, and several mattresses blocked the garage. It explained two weeks of vans, station wagons and a collection of south of the border

types coming and going from the house. The heavy drapes that prevented the outside world from entering had been removed. The Tudor looked scared. It was being devoured a piece at a time.

A tan beaten up Ford pickup truck with more rust than paint blocked the flagstone walk. *Willie Reynolds Odd Jobs and Hauling* was stenciled in red paint on both doors. An area rug with a \$35 price tag and a rag tagged sleep sofa were in the cargo bay. Joe ground his cigarette in the flowerbed and skirted the truck. He paused at the threshold of the open door. Two black handymen struggled to remove the crystal chandelier. An extension ladder too short to reach the vaulted ceiling leaned against the fascia of the second floor landing. Clothesline, tied to one of the wings of the chandelier, ran to a pulley screwed to the ceiling.

“For Christ’s sake, Willie, be careful!” screamed a woman no taller than four-eleven, wearing a lime green pantsuit highlighted by red hair tied in a bun on the back of her head. She touched a large gold cross dangling from a matching chain as the ladder momentarily rocked back from the landing.

Joe watched with amusement. Willie, the fifty-something salt and pepper haired owner of the truck, had the physique of a football tackle. His biceps rippled against the sleeves of his gray T-shirt as he stretched from the top rung of the ladder to release the chandelier from its electrical connections. His forehead glistened with beads of sweat.

“Listen Ruth,” Willie replied, rearranging his grip on the ladder, “you told me we was removing a ceiling light. Nothing was said about a two-hundred pound crystal chandelier. We’ll get it down if you leave us alone.”

Ruth stared at Willie. “What did you...”, she started to say then threw her hands up in frustration. “Let’s get the damn thing down. It’s getting late.”

Willie wiped his face with his arm. “Son. Pay attention!” he said to his cohort holding the end of the rope. “James!”

Joe felt the tension between the two. The younger Reynolds was the opposite of his father—bean pole thin, dreadlocks, and hadn’t worked up a sweat. With his mind, on the song streaming into his ears from his Walkman, he looked at his father and pulled on the rope.

Joe stepped into the foyer, squeezed around a couple holding a torch lamp, and entered the living room. It was eerily dark, the only light coming from the naked windows. All of the furniture had been removed except for an ornate orange upholstered chair precariously balanced on three legs

against the side of the fireplace. The hearth had been bricked closed. Reddish brown mud streaked the threadbare beige carpet.

"It's almost four o'clock, we're getting ready to close," Ruth barked as she entered the living room.

Joe turned around. "No problem."

A middle age woman wearing a version of Ruth's lime green pantsuit peeked into the room. "I'm cutting out. Upstairs and the basement are clear."

"Silvia, I need you here tomorrow by ten," Ruth ordered.

Silvia sighed, waving her hand over her head as she walked out of the house.

"Lime green is a nice touch," Joe said.

"I think so. It sets us apart from the buyers." Ruth gave Joe the once-over. "You're the hero cop."

"I was in the wrong place at the wrong time," Joe said modestly.

"Ruth Ritchie," she said, offering her hand. "I own *Attic Finds*."

Joe shook her hand. "Joe Henderson, owner of a gimpy leg."

Ruth removed a pack of cigarettes tucked in her sleeve and tamped a non-filtered Pall Mall against her leg. "You wouldn't have a match?" she asked, patting her pockets.

Joe flicked his Zippo and held it for Ruth. "You don't look like the estate sale type," she said.

"I hate garage sales, estate sales and any other scam that redistributes junk from one house to another." He moved to the fireplace, bending to inspect the bricked hearth.

Ruth's rapid long drags produced ash an inch long. She flicked the ash onto the rug. "Then why bother coming in?"

"I knew Preston a long time. Call me curious," Joe said, running his hand along the brick and mortar closure. "He must have been afraid of Santa Claus."

Ruth spit a piece of tobacco. "Mr. Swedge wasn't just afraid of Santa Claus. There are dead bolts on a couple of the interior doors."

"Damn it James, pull on the rope!" Willie yelled in the hall.

The sound of tinkling crystal turned Ruth on her heels. She ran into the hall. Joe followed. Mutilated plaster and wire lathe hung from the ceiling where the chandelier tore the electrical box from the floor joist above.

Willie scrambled down the ladder and placed a gray woolen blanket under the chandelier as James lowered the two-hundred pounds to the floor.

Ruth ran her fingers across the crystals. “Amazing none are broken. Here are the addresses. Make sure it gets there in one piece and make it your first stop.” Ruth handed a sheet of paper to Willie.

“One day...,” Willie left off as he snatched the paper. “James, get the dolly.”

“I’ve got a couple of things to finish. Joe, you’ve got about ten minutes.” She headed for the kitchen.

Resting on alternate steps, Joe climbed the stairs to the second floor. The hall seen from the bottom of the staircase led to a master bedroom, two small bedrooms, and a full bath. The small bedrooms had been picked clean except for odd scraps of tissue paper.

Joe leaned heavily on the five-iron in an attempt to keep pressure off his throbbing leg. As with the other bedrooms, the master at the end of the hall was devoid of furniture. Preston’s suits lay crumpled in the space where the bed was once situated. That section of the oak hardwood was pristine. A Crucifix remained above where the headboard marred the plaster.

The floor was grooved and worn between where the bed was located and a small study directly to the right. Joe envisioned Preston pacing with his hands clenched behind his back. Preston explained in an alcohol fueled rant that the eight foot by eight section was formerly his wife’s dressing area. He had the vanity replaced with a built-in bookcase which was empty except for a 1942 Princeton University yearbook on the top shelf. Torn and faded *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines lay strewn on the floor, along with a few issues of *Christian Monthly*.

A leather satchel without its handle sat in the corner. Sweeping dust off the front flap with his hand, Joe could barely read Preston’s faded monogram. The lone contents, a Post-It note with “6 down 3 across” scrawled in pencil. Using the five-iron, he scooped the yearbook off the shelf. Opening the cover, he read the dedication to Hans Schmidt, a math professor killed in a Nazi bombing raid on London. Joe thumbed to the S section. A weasel face with hair combed and slicked like Errol Flynn’s stared back. Preston Swedge hadn’t changed in nearly sixty years except for his hair going snow white.

Joe placed the yearbook into the satchel and returned to the bedroom. From the pile of suits, he found a matching black gabardine pants and jacket. He held the pants to his waist. At five-ten the pants were three inches long. He folded the suit and stuffed it into the bag.

Joe made his way down the stairs. Willie Reynolds had managed to remove the chandelier. An eerie stillness filled the house. The five-iron echoed off the walls of the hallway. Solitary bulbs in plastic receptacles replaced the brass wall sconces. He entered the kitchen.

Ruth stopped counting the day's take from a cash register on the Parson's table. "The briefcase is definitely a keeper."

Joe dumped the suit and yearbook on the table. "Got these too."

Ruth raised an eyebrow. "Yearbooks are collectible, but a sixty year old suit?"

Joe looked under the table. A faint stain remained where Preston had melted into his shoes. "It'll make a good scarecrow for the garden." Growing tomatoes and cucumbers was on the same list as going fishing. He had no reason for taking any of the items. "What do I owe you?"

Ruth swatted at a fly as she continued to count the receipts. "It's on me."

The fly was a holdover from Preston's gourmet buffet. Three of its cousins were perched on top of the refrigerator. "That's very kind," he said, trying not to laugh. Joe returned his treasure to the satchel and pointed to an opened door. "What about the basement?"

Ruth looked up. "Nothing of value down there," she said. "The light switch is one step down on the left."

The kitchen's overhead fluorescent light failed to illuminate the area immediately inside the door. Joe eased his left foot to the edge of the tread. The angle of the staircase seemed excessively steep. He froze. Twice he had lost his balance on his own basement steps after returning from the rehab facility. Three times was a charm he wanted to avoid.

Chalky paint crumbled on his hand as he searched the wall. There wasn't a wall plate. He could feel the outline of the old Bakelite switch. Anticipating a shock, he timidly flicked the lever. A clear light bulb at the base of the steps glowed then burned out. A second bulb hanging in the middle of the room dimly lit the lower half of the staircase. He took a deep breath and proceeded one step at a time. Dust and the hint of aged cat urine

irritated his nose. Joe was besieged by a coughing fit as he cleared the last step.

A half-hearted cleaning job had been made. Broom marks were left in the grime build-up of more than six decades. The windows had been removed and replaced with bricks. Black-green mold crept up the cement walls in the stagnant air.

Joe cleared a patch of cobwebs hanging from the exposed beams with the club, making his way to the center of the room where sheets of paper and an assortment of manila envelopes were piled. A badly stained and crumpled map caught his eye. It wasn't from the AAA. It was a U.S. Army Air Force map from WWII.

Joe poked the paper scrum with the five-iron, exposing a rectangular cordovan leather wallet. With Preston's miserly reputation, Joe expected pre-historic moths to emerge, having hatched between the first George Washingtons Preston earned. It wasn't a wallet, but Preston's passport declaring him a representative of the State Department. The last entry was an Israeli stamp dated 1956. Joe thought it odd that the obituary in *The Star Ledger* only mentioned his employment in the petroleum industry.

Joe picked up a manila envelope and opened the flap. Three photos were stuck together. He peeled them apart. A girl, he guessed to be around six, posed in what resembled a communion dress. A parasol rested on her shoulder. He turned it over. There was no date or notation. The second, a black and white wallet size photo of a boy dressed in a suit and tie looking scared stiff. A *tallis* was draped around his neck. It was the kid's Bar Mitzvah picture. The third—Preston and Millie Swedge on vacation taken in front of a non-descript motel.

He poked around. A 10×10 of Preston resting a foot on the bumper of his beloved Fairlane caught Joe's eye. A large chunk had been ripped away. Joe picked it up and moved under the light. The person standing next to Preston had been cropped out, just leaving the tips of John Doe or Jane's fingers.

Cat-like, Ruth descended the stairs. "Are you finished?" she asked, standing on the fifth step from the bottom.

Startled, Joe jumped. "What's going to happen this?" he asked, motioning to the papers.

"I have a crew coming in to clear the place out."

"Would anybody mind if I took this stuff?" Joe asked.

“Absolutely not. Mr. Hargrove, the attorney handling the estate, instructed nothing is to be kept. He needs this wrapped up by Monday afternoon,” Ruth said. “I have some large trash bags upstairs.” She disappeared.

A wad of black plastic garbage bags landed with a thump. Joe managed to get the mess into one bag. He placed the five-iron under his arm and grabbed the bag by its drawstring. His leg screamed with each of the twelve steps. Out of breath, he dragged the bag into the kitchen.

The cash register was no longer on the table. “For someone who hates other people’s junk, you hit the jackpot.” Ruth searched her handbag for a cigarette. She held up a book of matches. “Can I bum a butt?”

Joe handed her a Marlboro. Ruth lit the cigarette, savoring the smoke. “What’s the attraction?”

“I don’t know,” Joe murmured.

Chapter 5

WESTFIELD, NJ SEPTEMBER 2000

JOE'S SUNDAY MORNINGS BEGAN after eleven. The routine, perfected over the months of his wife's absence, consisted of reading the rag-sheets and drinking enough coffee to kick up his ulcer. Joe settled in at the dinette armed with *The New York Post*, *The New York Times*, and the University of Arizona mug filled to the brim. The TV on the counter was tuned to the ESPN football pre-game show.

The clock above the sink read 12:30. He refilled the Mr. Coffee. "Come on girl, I've got to finish my homework," Joe said to Roxy lying under the table. The Giant-Eagle game didn't start until one. He needed to polish his research paper.

He headed toward the den armed with the mug of coffee and a new pack of Marlboros. Roxy followed but detoured to sniff the garbage bag and Preston's leather satchel on the dining room table. She pawed at the drawstring.

Joe placed the mug and cigarettes next to the bag. "Nothing good in there." He untied the drawstring, dumping the musty contents on the table. Roxy took one more sniff then returned to the kitchen.

Joe felt the supple leather of the cordovan wallet. The passport declared the holder to be employed by the U.S. State Department. The message was clear: Preston was a big-shot. Why Preston's government service wasn't mentioned in the three line obituary gnawed at the retired detective.

Joe flipped a stack of utility bills to the side. Time and humidity had taken its toll on the assortment of stray papers. Typing paper had turned to a brownish mush. Ink and pencil were illegible.

Joe put the pictures of the young girl in her communion dress, Preston and Millie on vacation, and Preston standing next to the Fairlane convertible to the side. He laid the crumpled loose-leaf size map on the table. Lines drawn in red ink ran between Foggia, Italy and Manowitz, Poland. Several numbers were circled on either side of the lines. He recognized the map as a navigation aid from memorabilia saved by an uncle who flew a B-17 based in England. The numbers were altitude rendezvous points.

“Where’s my Jozef?” the sultry voice asked, breaking the silence.

“In the dining room. I brewed a fresh pot of coffee. Grab a cup,” Joe said, looking toward the hallway.

Alenia Gilbert, the raven haired beauty from down the block, entered the dining room barefoot. One of Joe’s T-shirts strained to contain her 38DDs. The creations were the handiwork of a plastic surgeon the girls at the strip joint considered the god of silicon. “I felt for you, but you were gone,” she said with a pout.

Retired from the “trade” for two years, Alenia still possessed the moves that caused sane men to throw twenty-dollar bills onto the stage. On the other side of forty, the Russian émigré was devoid of fat, cellulite and stretch marks.

Joe followed her deeply tanned legs rounding the table. Her rhinestone encrusted G-string reflected the light streaming through a French door opened to a redwood deck. Joe reached behind him, flipping the door closed. “I don’t want to be responsible for giving Charlie Pond a heart attack. The old guy is always looking over the fence.”

Alenia sat on his lap. “I haven’t killed you, no?” she said, running her hands through his hair.

“Not yet,” he said with a laugh.

“What is this?” Alenia asked, pointing to the pile.

“It’s my treasure from the Swedge estate sale.”

Alenia scrunched up her face. “I *didn’t* like the way he looked at me. I told Harry and you know what he said?”

Harry’s high blood pressure and diabetes were a fatal combination in the bedroom. Joe liked Harry and rationalized bedding his wife as doing him a favor. “Not to be half naked when you went for your walk?” Joe asked as he rummaged through the mess.

“No. To smile and tell him to fuck off.”

A check laying at the edge of the pile caught Joe’s eye. It was dated October 2, 1975 made payable to Westfield’s only Jewish temple, Temple Emanuel, for \$5,000.

Alenia playfully squirmed on his lap. “Looks like garbage. I’m still tired. Let’s go back to bed.”

Joe let Alenia’s suggestion pass without comment. He stared at the check and took a gulp from the mug. “The *Five Books of Moses* on the kitchen table, the rabbi at the cemetery, and a donation to a temple. The man was closest to being an anti-Semite as one can be. Doesn’t make sense.”

She leaned back to nibble on Joe’s ear. “Jozef... I don’t care.”

Joe moved his head away. He rummaged through the mess. A sheet of carbon paper was sandwiched between a sheet of onionskin typing paper and a faded photo clipped out of a newspaper of a man in a glass booth. Joe strained to make out the face. Only one word was legible in the caption beneath. “Eichmann,” he said. “This was taken at his trial in Israel. Do you know who Eichmann was?”

“He killed the Jews in the Great Patriotic War,” Alenia said flatly. The Great Patriotic War was what the Kremlin dubbed World War II and drummed into children.

“You’re as smart as you are beautiful,” Joe said, patting her rear.

“Many of my family died in the war,” she said without emotion. “Maybe Mr. Swedge liked Nazis.”

“Preston was a lot of things, but I doubt that he was a Nazi lover.” Joe turned to the carbon paper. He hadn’t seen or handled the stuff in years. The paper was severely creased looking as if any manipulation would cause it to split. “Do me a favor. Get a pencil and the tweezers from the top right drawer in my desk.”

Alenia popped the G-string with her half-inch French manicured nails as she walked to the den. Joe felt where Alenia used the daggers to scratch the middle of his back. She returned with the pencil and tweezers tucked in the half-dollar size patch covering her nether region.

Joe held out his hand. Alenia snapped the items into his palm. Using the pencil’s eraser, Joe tried to hold the carbon sheet down on the table. “This isn’t working. Give me your fingers.”

Alenia held out her hands, pushing a two carat diamond toward Joe's face. He guided the nails on her index fingers to the edges of the carbon paper. "Don't move," he ordered.

Joe lifted the carbon paper with the tweezers just enough to slide the pencil under the flap, ever so slowly unfolding it along the crease. "You can let go," he said.

"Do I get a reward?" Alenia asked, puckering her lips.

"Later," he replied, using the tweezers to hold the carbon paper to the light. Alenia snuggled next to him. Joe read the typewriter impressions aloud, "31may1944. Photo Reconnaissance Fifteenth Air Force: Mission 60 PRS/462 Can D Exposures 4056-8. Height 27,000 feet. Aerial photographs of Manowitz, Poland; Synthetic rubber production facilities; also noted barracks and railroad lines to the concentration camp Auschwitz."

Joe put the carbon paper and tweezers on the table. He studied the loose-leaf sized map. "I don't believe what I just read." Stunned, he leaned back in the chair. Fumbling with the cellophane wrapper on the pack of cigarettes, he handed the pack to Alenia.

With the zip of a nail, she removed the wrapper and opened the pack. She handed a cigarette to Joe and took one for herself.

"What's got you in this punk?" Alenia asked. She moved a chair away from the table and sat.

"The word is funk," Joe corrected, taking a huge pull on the cigarette. He opened the door a crack to air out the growing haze of smoke. "The American Air Force took pictures of the Auschwitz concentration camp and didn't do a fucking thing. You see this map?"

Alenia nodded yes. "What do the red lines mean?"

Joe traced his finger along the straight line from Foggia, Italy to Manowitz, Poland. "This is the route bombers took to bomb a synthetic rubber plant less than four miles from the concentration camp. The crooked line is the return path to Italy."

"Syn-tetic rubber?"

"In the 1940s, tires were made from real rubber. The Nazis had limited supplies. They invented a way to make rubber from oil. We use something like it to make tires today." Joe flicked ash into the mug.

From between two crusty pieces of cardboard, Alenia removed a second piece of carbon paper. This piece was in pristine condition and easily read.

She held it up to the light.

EYES ONLY: JOHN P. McCloy
ASSISTANT SECRETARY, U.S. ARMY
20 August 44 Re: Mission completed.
Will return to Washington ASAP
Preston Swedge, Captain U.S.A.A.F.

“This McCloy a big shot?” Alenia asked with the cigarette dangling from her lips.

“I’m a little hazy on details about McCloy,” Joe said, tossing the cigarette into the coffee. “I’ve read some stuff about him—he was a big shot before, during and after the war. I’ll be right back.” He got up from the chair and walked out of the room.

Alenia looked through the pile and found a credit card sized envelope sealed with Scotch Tape. She removed a 2x2 photo of a young man in his dress army uniform.

Joe returned carrying the coat tree kept next to the front door. “Who’s this Rothstein?” Alenia asked, holding up the photo.

“Rothstein?” Joe asked as he placed the coat tree beside the French door. Alenia handed him the photo. The uniform bore the wings of a pilot. Joe turned the print over. Paul Rothstein was written in blue ink. “I’ll be a son of a bitch. Another Rothstein. How many ghosts did he have?”

“You’re talking crazy,” Alenia said in a huff.

“Give me the picture of the kid with the *yarmulke*,” Joe said.

“Call me Joe’s secretary,” Alenia said, handing over the photo.

“Secretary isn’t the adjective I use.” Joe held the picture labeled Rothstein along side the one of the Bar Mitzvah boy. “The kid looks like a younger version. What do you think?”

Alenia scrunched up her nose. “Same mouth and noze. Must be his off springs.”

“Offspring. One word and one kid,” Joe said, laughing. “Preston must’ve been friendly with Rothstein the flyboy to have his kid’s Bar Mitzvah picture.” He removed the suit from the leather satchel, buttoned the jacket

around the topmost hooks, and hooked the pants below. “Let me have Preston’s picture, the one where he’s standing next to the convertible.”

Alenia handed him the picture. Joe placed it into the jacket’s collar. “You were in the middle of something,” Joe said, looking at Preston atop the coat rack. “What, I don’t know.”

Chapter 6

WESTFIELD, NJ SEPTEMBER 2000

ALENIA HAD JUST STEPPED OUT OF THE SHOWER when her cell phone chimed her back to the reality of being married to Harry. She packed the G-string into a side pocket of her Gucci carry-all and slipped on a pair of what she called babushka underwear—non-see-through white bra and plain cotton panty. “Harry is on his way back from Atlantic City.”

Joe backed the Volvo onto the street to let Alenia’s Mercedes SUV out of the garage. When she arrived on his doorstep, the Benz was sequestered in the garage just in case Harry lost his shirt at the crap table and decided to come home to nestle his head in the bosom of his loving wife.

Joe flashed the Volvo’s high beams to signal that Tanglewood Lane was clear of prying eyes. Alenia screeched onto the street, blew him a kiss and was off.

It was 2:45. Finding the Rothstein photo put working on his research paper into the category of “I’ll get to it later.” He headed for The House of Beers to buy a six pack of Guinness Stout.

The parking lot of the converted gas station on the south side of town was deserted. Sunday football enthusiasts had completed their forays and were sitting at the feet of their televisions. Joe breezed into the store, gave a nod to the Pakistani clerk behind the register and fetched the beer from the cooler. The clerk robotically began to ring Joe’s weekly purchase of a twenty-four can carton of Budweiser, but caught his mistake. Distracted by a kid who looked about fifteen browsing the aisles, he handed Joe change from a twenty and hustled from behind the counter.

For an instant, Joe moved in the direction of the expected confrontation, and then stopped. Juveniles were somebody else’s problem. He put the

change in his pocket and walked out the door.

Joe placed the six-pack on the Volvo's passenger seat. It had been too long since he visited John Beauchamp, a retired Westfield detective who had taken Joe the rookie under his wing. It was on a reported break and enter call with Beauchamp that Joe was introduced to Preston Swedge.

Beauchamp's small yellow, two bedroom ranch was two blocks from The House of Beers. Parking on the street, Joe walked through an ivy covered red cedar arbor bound by hedges running the length of front yard. A wood ramp extended from the driveway to the front door. The tough guy cop cheated death when he suffered a massive stroke that left him paralyzed on his right side. Joe and the crew, who helped remodel his colonial, built the ramp and widened the interior doorways to make the house wheelchair accessible.

Helen Beauchamp, John's bride of fifty years, answered the door. "I feel bad I haven't been around," Joe said, giving her a kiss on the cheek as he stepped inside.

"I was on my way out to do some shopping," Helen said. "The girls okay?"

Joe wasn't going to get into his domestic mess. "They're good." He held up the Guinness.

"John's favorite. He's in the Florida room watching his beloved Giants." She put the strap of her handbag over her shoulder. "Don't be a stranger."

What Joe and the crew couldn't widen were the halls. Chair rails attested to the limited width with deep scars and chipped paint from the armrests of John's wheelchair. The wood floor in the hall between the front door and the kitchen was worn by its wheels. Directly off the galley kitchen was the Florida room.

Joe stood in the doorway. The original screened porch was enclosed using sliding glass doors to let John view the outdoors during his painfully slow rehabilitation. Plants, thriving in the hot-house like temperatures, filled clay pots and hanging baskets. John, despite being propped against a pillow, was slumped to the side of his motorized wheelchair. A plastic cup of water and a bowl of pretzel nuggets were in easy reach on a wicker end table that matched a loveseat and rocker.

Joe's rapping on the indoor/outdoor carpet with the five-iron was no match for the sound blasting from a fifty inch projection television. "Old

man!” Joe yelled.

John hit the joystick control with his left hand, spinning the chair around. A gauze strip, tied around his right hand to the wheelchair’s seatbelt, prevented the arm from dangling into the wheel. The right side of the ex-cop’s face was permanently in a frown. With vision in only his left eye, John took a moment to focus on the face in the doorway. “You look like shit,” he paused, lowering the volume with a remote Velcroed to the side of the wheelchair. “What the fuck have you done to yourself?” He stuck out his left hand.

Joe took his hand. “Too much time on my hands gives me the munchies. What’s the score?”

“They’re getting creamed. 27-3 Eagles. It’s the same tune year after year. They can’t throw the ball. Will I live to see the day that a pass is completed for more than ten yards?” As John spoke, saliva dribbled across his chin. Using a dishtowel tucked between his thighs, he wiped his mouth.

Joe put the six pack on the end table. “I haven’t been over...”

“Save it,” John interrupted. “You’ve got stuff, I’ve got stuff. Do me a favor and open a bottle of that heavenly creation.”

Joe twisted the tops off of two bottles, handing one to John. The room was hot from the still potent fall sun. Joe removed his windbreaker and sat on the wicker loveseat. “Preston Swedge,” Joe said.

“I read in the paper the old shithead croaked a couple of weeks ago.” John struggled to hold the beer bottle in his left hand racked with arthritis. He turned the wheelchair to face the television. “You got a cigarette? Brunhilda went out. She watches me like a hawk.”

“Helen’s not going to be happy.” Joe removed two Marlboros from his pack, lit both with his lighter, and handed one to John.

“I’ll blame the smell on you,” John laughed, taking a puff. “What about Swedge?”

Joe stretched out on the loveseat and propped his right leg on the armrest. “The obituary in the *Ledger* omitted the detail that the deceased had turned into a maggot farm. He was found sitting in his kitchen ten days after he met his maker.”

The Eagles recovered a Giant fumble, returning it for a touchdown. “Bastards!” John yelled. He took a long sip from the beer bottle. “People die and aren’t missed all the time. If I didn’t have Helen, the same could

happen to me.” He took a puff on the cigarette, choked on the smoke and had trouble catching his breath. He put the cigarette in the glass of water.

Joe tapped his cigarette on the edge of the water glass. “I found this at Swedge’s estate sale.” He removed the 2x2 photo of Paul Rothstein from the breast pocket in his golf shirt.

“Can’t see a fucking thing without my glasses,” John said, grabbing a pair of readers on the end table. He took the photo, turning the wheelchair so the light from the windows came over his shoulder. “Handsome fella. Flyboy.”

“Turn it over,” Joe said.

“Paul Rothstein!” John gasped. “I thought his ranting and raving about a guy named Rothstein was nothing but him being a lunatic.”

Joe finished his Guinness and lit another cigarette. “I have Preston’s passport. Did you know what he did for a living?”

“Something with oil,” John said with a far away look. “It was in the obit.”

Joe grabbed the arm of the wheelchair and turned John to him. “He worked for the State Department.”

“People leave government jobs. They got to do something.” John turned the wheelchair back to the television. “

“Other papers I found lead me to believe he was on a secret mission during the war, and I think Paul Rothstein was involved.” Joe said, leaning on the five-iron.

John finished his bottle. “A long time ago, I told you if you wanted to be a detective, you had to think like a detective. Find out if Paul Rothstein is alive, and if he isn’t, find out when, how and the circumstances of his death. If you figure it out, come back and tell me why Swedge acted like an ass for forty years.”

Chapter 7

WESTFIELD, NJ SEPTEMBER 2000

ROSA ARRIVED EARLY, banging through the door at 10:00. She had been working upstairs for forty-five minutes before pushing a vacuum into the den. “I got to take Ricardo to the doctor,” she said, holding a plastic bucket containing a selection of cleaning products. “If I no finish everything, I’ll do it on Friday.”

Joe didn’t ask why—Ricardo had been a hypochondriac since Rosa was a nanny for Emily. “Not a problem,” he replied, not looking away from the computer screen.

“I found this on the side of the bed.” A gold bracelet dangled from her hand.

Joe turned to Rosa. The bracelet belonged to Alenia. “I’m sleeping upstairs again. You should be proud of me.” He took the bracelet and placed it into the change pocket of his Levis.

Rosa sniffed the air. “This room stinks.” She opened one of the windows. Removing a can of air freshener from the bucket, she attempted to mask the tobacco smell with a heavy dose of lilac scented spray. “You got school today?” she asked, dumping the coffee can ashtray into the bag.

Joe scratched the stubble on his chin, silently cursing himself for signing up for *Geopolitical Systems*. Maybe the booze, beer, and assorted prescriptions for his pain and depression had affected his brain. Maybe he couldn’t keep up with kids half his age. Maybe he just didn’t care. What difference would it make, if at the age of fifty-two he got his master’s degree in history? “Yeah.”

The half page on the LCD screen of Joe’s computer was testimony to his inability to concentrate and his ability to waste time. *Word* could check

spelling, syntax, and grammar but couldn't finish the research paper. The drop date for getting out of *Geopolitical Systems* without penalty was the next day. He had to make a decision and didn't have the luxury of waiting till Friday to talk things over with Dr. Headcase. Quitting *anything* didn't exist in the Henderson family's psyche—until now.

Rosa picked three crushed beer cans from a wastepaper basket beside the desk, placing them into the bag. She reached for a can on the desk.

"Leave it," Joe ordered. "It's part of my breakfast." He nibbled on a piece of buttered rye toast and took a swig from the bottom of the warm can of beer opened in the middle of night. "I ran out of coffee."

Rosa attached a brush to the end of the vacuum's hose. "These books are so dusty."

"Do me a favor and clean another room. I'm trying to get this done," Joe said, rocking back in his father's chair. The research paper wasn't the only source of his angst. On the corner of the desk, next to the photo taken at his police academy graduation, was a book written about the Holocaust. If his interpretation of the carbon paper dated May 1944 was correct, 300,000 Hungarian Jews were on their way to the gas chamber at Auschwitz the same year that the U.S. Fifteenth Air Force began operations from bases in Italy. A single five hundred pound bomb dropped from the belly of a B-17 could've put the killing machine out of operation.

Perhaps he was naïve to think the millions shoved into the crematoria would've lived if the Allies acted. But, the country he thought to be the champion of freedom did *nothing*.

Rosa unplugged the vacuum, picked up the bucket and garbage bag, and moved into the dining room. "*Mio Dio!* What is this?"

"Don't touch anything on the table. I spent most of last night organizing it," Joe shouted.

"Mr. Swedge makes my skin itch," Rosa said.

The door bell rang. "Be a good girl and answer the door," Joe asked.

Rosa mumbled something Joe couldn't quite make out as she went to the front of the house. Roxy raced down the steps. "You, stay!" Rosa said as she opened the door. The dog circled back to the base of the steps. "Joe, there's a *woman* who wants to see you."

Joe slipped on his sneakers and grabbed the five-iron suspended on the edge of the desk. Slowly, he rose from the chair barely able to put weight on

his right leg that was stiff from sitting for three hours. He hobbled through the dining room. Pausing in the hall, Joe tucked his T-shirt into his Levis.

Watching from the kitchen, Rosa said, "Give her the bracelet."

"It's manners to invite a person in," Joe needled as he pat his pocket and gave her the thumbs up. Looking through the glass sidelight, he was surprised to see Ruth Ritchie standing on the landing. Ruth had exchanged the lime green pantsuit for a demure black dress. Her hair, out of the bun, was shoulder length. A pearl necklace replaced the gold cross. She had lost the tough momma look and twenty years.

Joe checked Roxy who sat at the base of the stairs, then opened the door. Ruth held out three books bundled by twine. "These were found in the master bedroom study. Since you took his papers, I thought you might be interested. If you're not, throw them in the garbage. I'm finished across the street." The roar of a winch echoed across the street as the garbage dumpster was hauled onto the flatbed of a truck dispatched by the disposal company.

Joe took the bundle, visualizing the converted dressing area. "The bookshelves were empty except for the yearbook."

"One of my employees lost the backing from an earring. She found it stuck between two floor boards," Ruth said, straightening her pearls. "When she used the blade of a pocket knife to pry the backing out, one of the boards moved. A lot of the older houses have spots where owners kept jewelry and valuables. Thinking that she was onto the greatest find since gold was discovered in California, she pried up the board to reveal a compartment below."

Before he could say a word, Ruth turned on her heels and walked down the steps to a new Cadillac Seville parked in the driveway.

Joe watched her drive away. He knew he had been in the presence of a female Barnum who played to her audience of bargain hunters. Ruth convinced the skeptics that they had in their hands a "find" and get them to pay a premium for the right to take it home.

Joe flipped the door closed with his left foot. Rosa never moved from the kitchen doorway. "Different girlfriend," Joe said. He carried the new found bounty to the dinette table in the kitchen.

Rosa turned her attention to dishes Joe left in the sink. "You're going crazy."

“That’s what all the ladies tell me.” He rotated the bundle under the light of the Tiffany fixture. It wasn’t twine like he used to bundle newspapers for recycling, but a rough thistle his mother employed to stake tomato plants in her Brooklyn vegetable garden. From a butcher block cube kept near the stove, Joe removed a steak knife and cut the cord. Two of the books were bound in the same cordovan leather as Preston’s passport cover. The third bore a black and green flecked cardboard cover of a basic composition book used in grammar school.

Joe sat at the table, flipping through the pages of all three. Yellowed and faded, the pages had worked away from the bindings. Sections had been removed. The three volumes were diaries. The leather covered journals were written with a stylish flair in comparison to the composition book where the letters were small, tight and printed. The time frames were the same. The two authors were living parallel lives.

Rosa finished washing out the sink and squeezed out the sponge before placing it in a porcelain dish on the window ledge. “I’m going. See you Friday,” she said. “You forget about school?”

Joe opened one of the leather covered diaries. “Grab me a beer. I’ve got reading to do.”

Chapter 8

PRINCETON, NJ SEPTEMBER 1938

AT ONE O'CLOCK, A BLACK PACKARD touring sedan turned off of U.S. Route 1, following the road signs to Princeton. Driving time from New York City to the sleepy New Jersey town was almost two and one half-hours, excluding a stop at a roadside stand for a cold drink. The dog days of August continued July's oppressive humidity. Preston Swedge, accompanied by his parents Herbert and Bernice, were arriving at the "family" university to become the third generation to enter as a freshman. This was to be his foundation for assuming a leadership position in the higher social strata of New York.

Tracing its roots back to the founders of the island of Manhattan, the Swedges were descendants of Dutch traders, as were their hated rivals, the Roosevelts. In the 1890s, Grandfather Percival Swedge had an unbridled, jealous, and losing competition with Theodore Roosevelt when Teddy was the New York City Police Commissioner. Herbert continued the rivalry with Franklin. He was an ardent crusader against the New Deal, contesting any program that could threaten the family brokerage and international consulting business. Preston was expected to take his place in the war between Republicans and Democrats, between conservatives and liberals.

Normally the chauffeur would have been at the wheel, but Herbert wanted to bring his son, who he viewed like any other investment, to the place he truly loved without interference from an outsider. His fondest memories were found on Nassau Street. The Packard turned into the drive near the Central Admissions Building. Herbert and Bernice got out of the car, but Preston remained motionless in the still air of the back seat. His

starched long sleeved white shirt was laden with sweat, causing the deep brown leather seat back to adhere like barnacles to a boat.

Herbert attempted to cajole his son from the car; a scene that had played before in Connecticut when Preston was delivered to boarding school. Preston suffered through anxiety attacks and would escape into a trance-like state when stressed.

Arriving in Connecticut a shy and self-deprecating boy, Preston left as an adult sure of himself. Four years at the prep school Choate had transformed him in both mind and body. Preston learned to enjoy the challenge of the athletic field, and the new found release increased in proportion to his rapid growth. By graduation, Preston was six-two. He had assumed the captaincy of the football team, leading his brethren to a prep school championship. The study of philosophy and history became passions of the budding academic. However, beneath this success story, was an ever-present force tugging on Preston's psyche. He learned to suppress his fears for the majority of the day, but the nights were a different matter. His roommates routinely needed to wake him from nightmares.

Herbert fought to control his temper. "Son, it will be alright. For God's sake, get out of the car." Preston slowly shifted his eyes left and right, focusing on his father. Their relationship was footed on confrontation. Herbert exercised a stream of threats and exhortations when Preston didn't conform to the Swedge model. The years spent in Connecticut allowed Preston to develop away from his father.

Bernice didn't provide a counterbalance to her husband's cold and impersonal relationship. With a staff of servants, the youngster was raised with minimal involvement of his mother and developed emotional attachments to adults who demonstrated a sense of caring. He was influenced and at times manipulated by the people and events surrounding him.

"Why are you staring at me?" Preston asked, wiping sweat from his forehead. "Have we arrived?" His coal-black stick straight hair was plastered down on his head, the collar of his shirt was stained, and his pants were hopelessly wrinkled.

Herbert was incredulous and turned to his wife. "Please, get him out of the car and try to make him look presentable."

“Get a change of clothes from one of his suitcases in the trunk.” Bernice was distressed by the way her son could be transformed into a creature she didn’t understand or recognize. The changes were dramatic and startling. She knew that many of her son’s psychological demons could be traced to her, but she was powerless to mediate them.

Preston did as instructed and followed his parents into Dowd Hall looking for a restroom. The cool air of the hallway was welcome. A men’s room was to the left of the admissions reception area. Preston studied the image in the mirror above the sink, cursing the Swedge legacy. He freshened himself then changed his clothes. Leaving the men’s room, Preston found his parents looking at class pictures going back to the 1870s lining the walls. Herbert found his own, his father’s, and pointed out classmates to his wife. “Mr. Phillips is waiting two doors on the right,” Herbert Swedge said. “We’ll leave your things in the holding area and be off.”

Preston wasn’t surprised by the brusqueness of his father. He turned to his mother. “When did he decide to change plans, when I was in the men’s room?” Herbert planned to show his son his old stomping grounds. “This excursion was *his* idea. I could’ve taken the train.” He handed his mother his soiled clothes. “Maybe I’ll see you at Thanksgiving, if you’re going to be in town.”

Preston walked into the waiting area of the empty office. “Greetings, Mr. Swedge, I’m Stanley Phillips, coordinator for incoming students.”

“I’m Preston. Mr. Swedge is on the way back to New York City.” They both laughed. Preston was handed schedules for orientation and meals. Classes were scheduled to begin in two days.

“A third year student will be here in a few minutes to take you over to Albert Hall. Your things will be delivered once you’ve checked in. If I can be of assistance in any way, please contact me.” Phillips extended his hand.

Preston took a seat in the anteroom. Within five minutes his guide arrived. “Good afternoon, I’m Robert Livingston. I will be your guide today and ordained by the powers that be, your mentor.”

Preston suddenly felt the sensation that all the class pictures were staring at him. Livingston spurred him on. “You can come back and look at the rogue’s gallery. I did it, and have returned several times over the years. These pictures can be a positive force when things don’t go so well.

Remember, some of them finished last in each class.” A smile broke across Preston’s face.

Their footsteps echoed on the marble floor. The admissions building, erected in 1765, was one of the oldest on campus. The quintessence of federal architecture, its red bricks were outlined at the corners by buttresses of fieldstone. Sunlight, filtering through a transom above the door, spotlighted the letter P in the floor. The portico facing to the west side of the campus led to a gravel path.

“Princeton isn’t the gentleman’s club the administration wants you to believe,” Livingston said as they stepped on the path. “The competition is fast and fierce and egos are as tall as oak trees.”

They walked in silence for a few minutes. The distance to Albert Hall was almost three quarters of a mile. The gravel path gave way to a concrete sidewalk that led to a park-like common area punctuated by skyscraping trees. “The residence halls are infernos,” Livingston said. “We spend as much time out here in the shade as possible. I think I see your roommate. Mr. Johnson!”

A stocky, average height teenager sitting on a bench in the shade waved. He ground a cigarette in the grass, slowly rose to his feet, and loped across the green. “Mr. Johnson, I would like to introduce you to your roommate, Mr. Swedge,” Livingston said.

Preston extended his hand, “Call me Preston.”

“I’m Clark,” he said, looking up at Preston who was a good four inches taller. “Let me take you upstairs.” His ruddy face and dirty blonde hair were streaked with sweat.

“Gentlemen, I will be in my room over at Dawson. If you need anything, ring me up.” Livingston sauntered away.

“I arrived yesterday from Detroit, and already can’t stand this damn weather. The train was a sauna, and our room is a blast furnace. I haven’t slept in days,” Clark said, leading Preston toward a Georgian brick two storied building on the right side of the mall. Three massive chimneys protruded above the gabled roof. “See that chimney to extreme left? Our rooms are right underneath it.”

Granite steps led to a white paneled door framed by pilasters painted to match. The door was open. “Brace yourself for the housemaster. He’s a total prick, and I’m already on his shit list,” Clark said.

Facing them stood Ellis Price, his hands clasped behind his back. Impeccably dressed in a three-piece navy suit, Price was the epitome of deportment. His reputation was a no-nonsense rule stickler who viewed all newcomers as potential trouble until proven otherwise. A shade over five feet, Price relished the role of being Princeton's Napoleon.

"Name!" Price barked.

"Preston Swedge," he replied, towering over Price.

Price walked behind the reception desk, retrieving a room key and a sheet of paper. Holding them at arms length he said, "You are responsible for your key and will be charged for a replacement. The rules of the house are listed on this sheet of paper." The corners of his razor thin mustache rose as a grin appeared on his face. "Mr. Johnson seems to have trouble comprehending what he reads. Mr. Swedge, I trust you don't have the same problem."

Preston took the key and paper. Price returned to his position in front of the desk.

Preston and Clark climbed an oak staircase to the second floor landing. "I told you he was a prick," Clark said, laughing loudly.

"Getting on the wrong side of the housemaster in the first twenty-four hours must be a record," Preston said.

Clark shrugged his shoulders, turned left, and proceeded to the end of the hall. Clark unlocked the door to room #22, ushering Preston into a living room furnished with two fireside chairs, a coffee table, and a settee. A bedroom was on either side of the room.

"I took the liberty of taking the bedroom on the left," Johnson said. "Call over to admissions and ask them to send up your gear."

Preston walked into his bedroom, taking stock in the fact that it wasn't far removed from the configuration at Choate—twin bed, maple desk with matching ladder-back chair and four drawer dresser. The lone closet was smaller than the broom closet in the family's Park Avenue apartment. A hand lettered sign tacked above the desk read, "IF YOU CAN'T BAFFLE 'EM WITH KNOWLEDGE BAFFLE 'EM WITH BULLSHIT"

With the blinds raised, a faint movement of air could be felt through the screens of the triple windows. Preston moved the twin bed next to the windows then returned to the living room where Johnson was stretched out on the small sofa with his eyes closed and his hands clasped on his chest.

Preston knew nothing about Clark Johnson except he was from Michigan. "I've been to Detroit a couple of times. What part of the city do you live?" he said, trying to break the ice. The exchange on the landing bothered Preston. He had the same roommate for four years at Choate and maintained the relationship after graduation. This one was going to be a challenge. Changing roommates wasn't an option.

Without opening his eyes, Clark replied, "I come from Bloomfield, twenty miles outside the city. I hate to go to Detroit. I don't know how you can live in New York City."

Preston walked to the windows. "Times Square, Broadway, restaurants, and the Yankees make it the greatest city in the country."

"I hate the Yankees," Clark said, taking a peek at Preston who hadn't moved. "The Tigers got a good chance to take them this year."

"Fat chance," Preston said. "Ever been to New York City?"

Clark sat up. "Why do you think I hate it? I've traveled to the cesspool by the Hudson with my father on more occasions than I want to remember."

Seeing how the Michigan native was pleased with himself in having tweaked Ellis Price, Preston didn't know if Clark was serious or joking. "What does daddy do for a living?"

From his pants' pocket, Clark removed a pack of Lucky Strikes and a box of matches. "Smoke?" he asked, offering a cigarette to Preston.

"No thanks," Preston said, reading a copy of the house rules on the coffee table. "Smoking isn't permitted in the room."

Clark tamped a cigarette on the table and struck a match on the sole of his shoe, exhaling a plume of smoke. He picked up the sheet of paper from the table, crumbled it, and tossed it toward the door. "Those are Price's rules, not the university's. Screw him."

"Your father?" Preston asked again.

"He works for Ford Motor," Clark said, reaching under the sofa for a glass ashtray, "contracts and such. He also dabbles in the company newspaper."

"*The Dearborn Independent*?" Preston asked with an edge. It was common knowledge that the Ford publication was anti-Semitic, anti Negro, and regularly read by Adolf Hitler.

"*The Independent* is a great newspaper." Clark sat on the windowsill and absentmindedly spit a fleck of tobacco. "Yours?"

“Investment banking.”

There was a knock on the door. “Enter!” Clark yelled.

The door opened a crack. “A pile of suitcases and one huge steamer trunk are downstairs.” The voice was from the deep south.

“Newman, meet Preston Swedge,” Clark said.

Brent Newman, a South Carolinian who roomed two doors down the hall, stood in the doorway. Blonde, lanky and tall as Preston, Newman still had a teenager’s look. Filthy rich from tobacco and cotton, the Newman family’s antebellum wealth miraculously survived the Civil War.

“Nice to meet you,” Newman said with a bow. He played the role of a southern gentleman to the max. “I’ve got many chores to conquer. Check you later.”

“Let’s get going before Price hits us with rule forty-four,” Clark said, lacing up his shoes.”

Preston popped off the sill. “There are only twelve.”

“Price will have the next thirty-two written if you don’t remove your goods from his sacred reception area in the next ten minutes,” Clark said as he walked into the hall. They both had a good laugh.

Clark bounded down the staircase, stopping on the last step at the sight of Preston’s four pieces of luggage and an oversized steamer trunk. “I thought Newman was kidding.”

“My...,” Preston said, catching himself before saying that his mother packed for him, “rule is to be prepared for anything.”

They swiftly carried the four pieces of luggage up to Preston’s room. The steamer trunk was another matter. Half way up the staircase, Clark lost his grip, dropping the trunk. The resulting crash and tidal wave of curses drew a raucous crowd, and Ellis Price from his office behind the reception desk.

Price, sans his suit jacket, stood with his hands tucked into the pockets of his vest. Laughter and catcalls turned to silence as Price glowered at Clark and Preston. “What are you waiting for? Give them a hand,” Price said to the audience on the landing.

As two volunteers stepped forward, Clark waved them off. “We’ll do it ourselves.” Beads of perspiration appeared on his forehead.

“Let them...,” Preston started to protest.

Clark cinched up his trousers and then worked his fingers under his side of the trunk. Preston lifted his end. “Let’s go,” Clark ordered.

Price watched as Preston bearing the weight of the trunk against his chest nearly fell backwards. Price shook his head and muttered, "Eight months of Clark Johnson."

The pair manhandled the trunk to their room. "Did you leave anything," Clark asked out of breath as he opened the door, "in New York?"

Preston wiped his face with a linen handkerchief. "You should've let the two guys help."

Clark gave the trunk a kick with his shoe. "I wouldn't give Price the fucking satisfaction. We'll push it into your room."

The trunk slid on the hardwood floor without difficulty. Preston undid the leather straps securing the lid and flipped it open. He removed blankets, pillows, four sets of sheets and placed them on the bed. A gooseneck lamp was unwrapped from a large bath towel and placed on the desk with a *Webster's* dictionary.

Clark stuck a cigarette in his mouth as he watched Preston search the bottom of the trunk. "Looking for gold?"

With both hands, Preston removed another bath towel wrapped object. "To me it's worth its weight in gold." He removed the towel to reveal the latest portable model RCA radio. "With this baby, I'll be able to pull in all the New York stations. You know what that means?"

Clark exhaled a burst of smoke in Preston's direction. "What does it mean?" he asked in a girly whine.

"That baseballs cracking off the bats of Gehrig and Ruth will fill the air as the Yankees win the pennant." Preston plugged the radio in a wall socket behind the desk and switched it on, producing nothing but hums and crackles.

"Should've bought a Philco," Clark said.

Preston adjusted the antennae on the back of the radio and rotated the tuner to 660, NBC's 50,000 watt New York station. Benny Goodman's *Stomping at the Savoy* came in loud and clear.

"Sounds better than the Philco I left home," Clark said with a broad grin. "I'll need to use it later to listen to Father Coughlin's show."

Preston recoiled at the mention of Coughlin's name. "How can you listen to the guy?"

Clark flicked cigarette ash into the palm of his hand. "Me and three and a half million others agree with him that Roosevelt and the Jews are working

behind the scenes to involve the United States in the next war in Europe and help the Russian communists destroy Christianity.” Red-faced, he pointed the cigarette at Preston. “Father Coughlin is a personal friend of my family. I’ve spent many Sundays at his church in Royal Oak.” Clark huffed out of the room.

Preston spent the remainder of the afternoon unpacking and closeting his clothes, making up his bed, and arranging his desk where he sat reviewing the paraphernalia he received from Coordinator Stan Phillips. According to the schedule, the next two days were one extensive orientation planned around textbook distribution and Dean Reynolds’ address.

Johnson walked into Preston’s room buttoning the cuffs of a highly starched white shirt. “It’s 5:45,” he announced, mimicking Ellis Price. “You must be presentable for dinner. You’ve got fifteen minutes.”

Preston left his desk and selected a seersucker lightweight sport coat and contrasting tie from the closet. “One hundred degrees and we have to wear a jacket and tie,” he muttered.

Johnson laughed, continuing his Price impersonation, “We are gentlemen, my good man. Not some riff raff.”

With Albert Hall accommodating fifty men, the hallway bristled with activity. After the debacle with the steamer trunk, Clark and Preston didn’t need to make any introductions as they navigated downstairs. Every dorm had its clowns—Clark Johnson and Preston Swedge were Albert Hall’s.

Ellis Price was at his post in the lobby inspecting his new charges. To his relief, the house passed muster. He bade them a good dinner as the contingent proceeded down the sidewalk. Preston tagged along as Clark gravitated to the head of the column.

The general commissary was a half-mile walk. On any other day, the excursion would have been pleasant, as the sidewalk meandered through a garden of wildflowers and manicured lawn. However, the temperature still remained in the ninety-degree range. By the time the troop arrived at the Roberts Building, the majority of the men had removed their sport coats and ties. White painted wrought iron railings led to a veranda wrapping around three sides of the building.

Clark paused at the wide-open double French doors. “We should try to set up our own table,” he whispered to Preston.

Roberts was unlike any dining hall that Preston had been to. The main room was paneled in deep mahogany with tables and chairs to match. The marble floor reflected light cast by a series of crystal chandeliers ten feet in diameter. Seating capacity was three hundred, allowing accommodation of the six freshman residence halls simultaneously. In order to provide for a true cross section of the student population, there were no assigned seats.

The china dinnerware, embossed with the Princeton crest, was set upon a crisply starched linen tablecloth. Clark settled into his chair, placing a napkin on his lap. Looking around the table reminded him of the admonishment his father delivered to him on the station platform: "Watch out for Jews, Negroes, and communists. You have to be courteous, but that is as far as you should go. It's us against them. Stick with your own kind, and things will be just fine." The elder Johnson wouldn't have been happy with the dark skins, hooked noses, and names that ended in vowels that populated the other six chairs. Clark kept the conversation superficial as the main course was eaten.

Clark, without explanation, left the table at the conclusion of the meal. Preston found him on the veranda sitting in a wicker chair with his feet on the railing not looking happy. He had removed his tie and jacket. A cigarette was clamped between his teeth.

Preston towered over his roommate. "Michigan must have different manners. What's your beef?"

Clark swatted at a mosquito on his arm. "This situation requires attention. If you want to be invited to an eating club, you better associate with the correct people," he said, squinting into the setting sun. Eating clubs, where upperclassmen enjoyed their meals, were restricted to movers and shakers. "Yesterday I met a gal who has access to the roster for the dining hall. I'm going to look her up tomorrow to find out who we should sit with."

Preston didn't reply. He had heard the same tune from his father.

Chapter 9

BROOKLYN, NY SEPTEMBER 1938

THE ALARM CLOCK RANG. Paul Rothstein turned over and squinted at the culprit. 6:00 a.m. Swinging his feet to the floor, he felt the breeze of the circular fan humming between the twin beds in the bedroom he shared with his brother Jake. He tried to walk silently to the only window in the room, but the tired oak floor creaked in response to each step. Jake began to stir. Paul pulled back the sheer curtains and leaned through the window. Flatbush Avenue already was streaming with traffic. As he turned around, Jake was propped on his elbow. “Kid, you ready for today? Remember, if you need anything, ask.”

Paul looked at his older brother by four years. “I guess,” Paul said with trepidation. “I wish you didn’t have to bust your ass so I could go to school. If I went to work, I could help put food on the table.”

“Go take a shower,” Jake answered, thinking of his roots. “I’ll put up some coffee.”

Abraham and Rachel Rothstein, childhood sweethearts in the small Hungarian town of Munkacs, married and landed in New York in 1914 weeks before the outbreak of the Great War. Abe, who learned the tailoring trade under the tutelage of his father, quickly became the floor manager of a small men’s pants factory. His lack of English posed little problem since the predominant language spoken at the sewing tables was Yiddish. Rachel found employment as a cook in a restaurant. Combining their two meager

wages, the Rothsteins were able to rent a cold-water flat in Red Hook, Brooklyn.

The apartment consisted of two rooms, one a bedroom, the other a combination kitchen and living room. Within months, Rachel became pregnant with her first child. An 8 pound 15 ounce boy was delivered during a snowstorm in the winter of 1916, named Jacob after Rachel's father. The loss of Rachel's salary was devastating, causing Abe to take a second job to meet the rent and assorted sundry items needed for an infant. Life settled into a predictable pattern, Abe leaving for the garment center in Manhattan by 5:30 in the morning, returning usually by 9:30 at night, leaving Rachel alone to take care of the baby.

Abe and Rachel believed that to be real Americans, they needed to be able to read and write English. Attending adult school was impossible, but Abe was determined to acquire these skills. Rachel suggested they buy an Hungarian-English dictionary and together they would learn to read the newspaper. If anything, this nightly translation and reading session provided the couple with a chance to spend a few minutes together.

After years of enduring his grueling routine, Abe longed for a change. The 1920s opened the door to prosperity as the world of Wall Street demanded fashion in men's haberdashery. He left his factory job to work in an upscale shop where "Kings of the Street" were outfitted. Abe's income tripled overnight. The time arrived for the Rothstein family to move to a better, safer area. And move they did to Flatbush.

The apartment was located on the top floor of the three-story walk up. The pride of the apartment was its bathroom, providing convenience and privacy. Abe and Rachel couldn't believe their good fortune; they had come to America with nothing, and then lived in what they considered luxury. With business booming, Abe thought about purchasing a home.

As Jake turned three, Rachel announced she was pregnant. This pregnancy was unlike the first. Into her second trimester, Rachel became ill. Her doctor ordered bed rest for weeks at a time. Paul Rothstein was born on July 18, 1920, six weeks premature. The infant weighed barely 4 pounds, raising fears for his survival. Paul proved to be a fighter, slowly gaining weight and strength. Medical problems continued for Rachel, leaving her lethargic and depressed. Due to his mother's inability to spend time with his brother, Jake became Paul's constant companion. Neighbors praised Jake to

his father, not believing he was only four. Abe came to depend on his older son, who never complained or asked for the toys of childhood. Abe called him “my right arm.”

With Rachel’s problems, Abe decided to forgo moving from the neighborhood. They had become active participants in the synagogue where the women of the congregation were eager to help Rachel when she was unable to take care of the boys.

Jake at thirteen, was already six feet and nearly 180 pounds, exceeding his father by more than six inches. He was an anomaly in a family of short people. The year was 1929 and the Flatbush Avenue businesses were prospering like the rest of America. Abe was kept busy at the shop six days a week, leading his boss to offer him a partnership. The world couldn’t have looked better. The Rothsteins’ only cause for concern was Jake’s academic performance. It became obvious that their older child wasn’t able to read and comprehend the basic subjects. His teachers were at a loss in trying to explain his problems while he became less and less interested in school. Paul was the opposite of his brother having progressed steadily in his studies, winning glowing reports from his teachers, whether in public school or the Hebrew academy.

For many, life in the Borough of Brooklyn was as thrilling as a ride on the great roller coaster at Coney Island. Then the brakes were applied. The economy screeched to a halt, throwing businesses large and small into disarray. The date was October 29, 1929. Word filtered out to the street that a great sell-off was under way. Abe walked out of the shop and sensed the panic in the crowd gathering outside the Stock Exchange. The normal lunch hour trade was non-existent; orders were not picked up or paid for. As the trading day came to a close, dazed brokers walked past the shop. Abe looked at faces that said so much without a word. He had seen fear like that when he was a young boy as survivors of a pogrom in a nearby village sought refuge in his town. “How could such a thing happen?” they yelled. Now, the scions of the financial world were crying the same.

Each day was greeted with great anticipation, but hope turned to despair. Abe was frightened, but tried to be optimistic before his family. Slogans emanating from Hoover’s Washington didn’t put customers in the shop or food in their stomachs. Business was dead, pure and simple. Months turned to years, and by 1932, unemployment had reached 12,000,000. The

situation in the Rothstein household was a bubbling cauldron. Abe the haberdasher was once again, Abe the tailor. The supply of gabardine suits vastly outstripped the demand. Instead of fitting three-piece suits, Abe darned holes and worn out knees. A man who was passionate about the rewards of hard work, who had returned home each night with a bounce in his step and a smile on his lips, had turned morose and crestfallen.

It was time for Rachel to support her husband, as he had when she held little hope for the future. Before her eyes, her Abraham aged rapidly; ebony hair had become mixed with silver. The boys, remembering when they couldn't keep up with their father's pace on the avenue, faked browsing the windows to let him keep step.

Rachel was resourceful and creative in running her kitchen. She had learned from her mother how to stretch what would feed one person to feed four. When her magic fell short, she was the one who ate less. Rachel joked that for the first time in her life, she had successfully followed a diet. A loss of twenty-five pounds put her back to the weight the day she married.

At dinner on New Year's Day 1933, Jake announced that he had made a decision: he was leaving high school. Abe and Rachel sat in silence. "Jake, you only have one more year to graduate. Your mother and I know how difficult it has been for you, and we are both very proud how you have tried your best. You may lose a job, or possessions, but one thing you can't lose, is an education," Abe said.

"School and me don't mix. I want to get a job and help out around here," Jake said.

"Where are you going to get a job?" Rachel asked. "You're sixteen. Grown men can't find work. You're not going to go ride the trains like the bums you see in the papers are you?"

Not surprised, Paul stared at his older brother. He tried to persuade Jake to stick it out with numerous discussions in the confines of their room. Jake countered each argument with the fact that their father was falling apart before their eyes and could no longer support the family both emotionally and financially. Jake couldn't divine any other option.

"No, Mama. I'm not going to ride the rails," Jake said softly. "I've been offered a job down on the docks by Nicky Spagnola's uncle."

Jake, by the age of sixteen, was six-four and had dramatically put on muscle. He was fast friends with Nicky Spagnola, nephew of a waterfront

boss. Neither Jake nor Nicky was destined for scholastic notoriety, preferring to perfect their skills at billiards. Hooky became paramount in their lives. The question for them was how to stay one step ahead of the attendance officer.

At a birthday party for Nicky's sister, Jake made the acquaintance of Tommy "The Corkscrew" Bavosa. "Are you sure you are really a Jew," the waterfront boss asked. "You're the biggest god damn Jew I've ever seen."

Corkscrew was an under boss for Lucky Luciano, "Boss of Bosses." Nothing moved on the docks without the permission of Luciano. Tommy became a made man for not making lighthearted decisions. He said to his cohorts, "Some day, this giant Jew is going to come in handy."

Jake began his maritime career as a messenger and generalized gofer. The kid impressed the crew chief with self-confidence and self-sufficiency. He had one other quality that drew attention—honesty, a rarity in that milieu of deceit and corruption. Jake was quickly elevated to rank of stevedore. At times he questioned if he had made the correct decision to quit school. The doubts vanished when he returned home to witness his father sitting in his faded brown chair beside the radio. By 1938, Abe had become a shell of himself.

If it were not for Jake, the family possessions would have been out on the street. Each week, Jake turned over his paycheck to his mother. Rachel had no idea that more money was made by side-work consisting of theft and extortion. Abe was proud of his son and thankful that tranquility had returned to the Rothstein house.

Paul finished his senior year of high school with grades placing him at the top of the class, but scholarship money was impossible to find. Never thinking he wouldn't be in the position of being able to provide an education for his child, Abe placed his pride in his pocket and approached Jake. "I have to ask you something a father shouldn't have to ask a son. I need your help to send Paul to college. If you have plans that would be interfered with by this, say so, and this conversation goes no further. Paul has no idea I'm discussing this with you."

Jake didn't hesitate. "Don't say another word. He'll be the first Rothstein to graduate from high school and go to college. I'll pay for it, but I want Paulie to believe you and Mama are paying."

Abe looked up at his son with adulation. The young man standing before him was far wiser than his twenty-two years. Yet, he had a sense that Jake was concealing another reason for the clandestine proposal. “You come home and give your mother your paycheck and still have money to play around. Now, you tell me that you’ll pay the entire bill for Paulie. I smell something fishy.”

Abe didn’t like the company Jake kept; many were right out of a Damon Runyon story, looking and sounding like gangsters. Jake looked sheepishly at his father. “Look Pop, you know the guys I work with aren’t choirboys. A lot of things go on you don’t want to know. Paul doesn’t need to be troubled by my business.”

Tiptoeing past his parent’s room, Paul entered the kitchen as Jake finished preparing breakfast. Paul was never surprised by anything his brother did. In his mind, Jake was unquestionably a Renaissance man. Yes, he was limited in his book knowledge, but when it came to interacting with people, Jake was the best. “I was going to grab a doughnut.”

“Doughnuts are for cops.” Jake placed a plate with eggs and toast on the table. “You need some brain food. Eat up and get your *tuchas* moving, or you’re going to be late on the first day.”

Paul finished his breakfast, picked up his notebook, and made his way to 21st and Flatbush Avenue where he spotted Dave Cohen reading a newspaper outside Schwartz’s Cigar Store. The two could have passed for brothers, had fought over wooden blocks in kindergarten, and were inseparable through high school. Both families celebrated their admissions to New York University at a dinner held in the social hall of the local synagogue. They would commute together to Manhattan by subway.

“Have you seen this?” Dave asked, showing Paul the front page of *The Daily News*. The headline read: GERMANS ANNEX CZECHOSLOVAKIA.

“That bastard Chamberlain sold the Czechs down the river,” Paul said. “They’re letting Hitler have his way. Only Churchill has the guts to speak

out.”

It was just a short walk to the subway, and they were already sweating. “What is it going to be like at noon? I’m dying now,” Dave said.

Paul didn’t answer, still thinking about the headline in the paper. His mother had received a letter from her Czech cousin begging to find a way to America. Rachel contacted every agency she could but to no avail. The immigration quotas were filled. She was told that “those people” would have to wait their turn. Abe wrote to his sister Miriam imploring the family to leave while they still could. Miriam replied that their home was in Hungary and things were still alright. The Jews were careful not to provoke the mainstream Hungarians who never needed an excuse to start a pogrom. Abe told her that one-day she would be sorry.

Paul and Dave walked down the steps into the bowels of the subway. The Brighton Beach Line was their conveyance to a new world. Conversation was impossible. Deafening noise entered open windows as the train shuddered to the Prospect Park station where an express train took them to Manhattan. Paul hated the pushing and shoving, and in the hot weather, the smell.

It was already 7:20. “The paper said to report to Main Building by eight. How much longer?” Paul asked.

“Twenty minutes at most. We’ve got it made in the shade.” Dave wrapped his arm around a metal support pole as the train lurched to a start. “My cousin Herbie joined an organization to fight these anti-Semitic shits that are coming out of the woodwork in this country. Even here in the city they exist. The radio guy Father Coughlin is going to hold a meeting at Madison Square Garden. Can you believe they would let a hatemonger rent the place?”

“For money, they would let Attila the Hun rent the place. Do you realize that on an average night 12,000 hot dogs are eaten and washed down with 1,000 gallons of beer and soda. That’s a lot of change,” Paul said.

The train reached its destination at West Fourth Street, Washington Square. The college career of Paul Rothstein was about to begin.

Chapter 10

PRINCETON, NJ SEPTEMBER 1938

PRESTON ROSE EARLY. The cool breeze streaming through the window was a harbinger of rain. With the Mid-Atlantic States in draught condition for six weeks, a slow steady rain was the unanimous wish of the area's population. He shaved, showered, and wrapped himself into a terry robe, then went downstairs to retrieve his copy of the newspaper.

Even at 5:30, he risked the wrath of Ellis Price. The man was resolute in enforcing the rules of the house. Price had admonished Preston not to venture into the vestibule in his robe. Preston, protesting that he was the only human awake in the building, drew a target on his back. Luck was on his side; Price was not lurking about.

Preston walked across the vestibule to the multi-locked front door. There was a time not long before Preston arrived that security was not a priority. The habit of the unlocked door, once a common practice in the rural Princeton area, had changed overnight. News of the Lindbergh baby kidnapping had spread fear throughout the community.

Preston turned the two deadbolt locks, then slid the security chain from its track. The sky was normally bright by that time, but rapidly traveling storm clouds let only faint rays into the portico. He lifted the bundle by the heavy twine wrapping, carrying it to the sidebar next to the reception desk. The headlines paralleled the weather. For weeks on end, the news from Washington focused on the confrontations between Democrats and Republicans. The Roosevelt administration had managed to pass the first minimum wage legislation. Republicans screamed it was pure socialism.

Economic squabbles were no match for the reports from Europe. The Spanish Civil War provided graphic portraits of fascist tactics where

Generalissimo Francisco Franco provided the Nazis with a testing ground for their new air weapons. Photos of German Stuka dive-bombing destruction of the Spanish city Guernica stared back at him. American apologists for Nazi Germany had difficulty explaining the brutality-taking place in Spain. There was talk on campus about a contingent of Princetonians joining the Abraham Lincoln Brigade that the conservative right labeled a communist band.

Preston flipped through the paper until he found the sports section. The Yankees defeated the Detroit Tigers the day before 4-1. Another pennant was virtually locked up, adding ammunition for his daily verbal squabble with Clark Johnson. Up to that point, his roommate appeared to have most of the answers on any given subject. Clark could harangue an opponent into submission by invoking an endless supply of minutiae. However, baseball was the one topic that the great debater could not win; the standings were the standings. Two plus two equals four and the Yankees had defeated Detroit and were in first place.

Preston couldn't contain himself. Not wanting to press his luck, he quickly made his way up the staircase. The rules of the house dictated no cooking of any kind in their rooms. Clark didn't consider brewing coffee the same. When Preston unlatched the door, the aroma was present. Clark was in the process of retrieving two mugs from behind the couch where they were hidden with the electric pot. Preston liked a good cup as much as Clark, but coffee wasn't worth the risk of being evicted from the dorm. "You're going to get us into water hotter than this coffee one day," he said.

Preston saw an aspect of his roommate's character countering the one Clark projected. Appearing to be a conservative conformist, his daily coffee subterfuge was a way of fighting authority. "May I please have the paper, Mr. Swedge?"

Preston watched Clark's eyes move to the dead babies pictured on the front page. His expression didn't change, but Preston could sense his revulsion to the senseless slaughter. "Franco and Hitler make a terrific couple, don't you think?" Preston needled.

Clark didn't answer. Preston knew his roommate would continue the discussion about the headlines later in the day. As Preston refreshed his mug, he kept his focus on Clark, waiting for him to flip to the sports page. He wasn't disappointed as the Yankee score hit Clark between the eyes.

“Looks like your boys are going to do it this year. It’s too bad the Tigers are banged up, or maybe they would’ve given them a run,” Clark said dejectedly.

For Preston, it was a monumental breakthrough. To admit defeat to a city he considered amoral and a haven for immigrants, was unheard of. Preston couldn’t resist the urge to pour salt on an obvious wound. “When was the last time you visited New York?”

“Last year. My family stayed for a few days before we sailed to Europe. My father and I went to Yankee Stadium for a game with Detroit,” Clark said, never moving the paper from his face.

“You have to admit that the stadium is a beautiful park,” Preston said.

“Such a pity that it’s located in the wrong city.”

Preston allowed the remark to pass. “How long were you in England?”

“We never went to England.” Clark tossed the paper onto the coffee table. “We sailed directly to Germany. Ford is helping the Germans produce a new car named the Volkswagen.”

“The people’s car,” Preston translated from German learned in high school. “I can’t believe that an American company is working for a dictatorship.”

Clark freshened his cup. “You should see what the Germans have accomplished.”

“Come on!” Preston said, raising his voice. “How can you justify what they’ve done to the Jews and others who’ve lost their citizenship?”

Clark calmly lit a cigarette. “The minorities in Germany have brought on their own troubles when they exploited the country’s problems for their own personal gain.”

“That crap is straight from Father Coughlin.” Preston banged the mug on the coffee table. “The Nazis’ power is based on hatred.”

“When was the last time you traveled to Mississippi?” Clark asked, blowing a smoke ring. “People live in squalor and don’t have the right to vote. In Germany, you don’t see slums, bums, or disorder. We would like the same in this country, but we don’t have the guts to implement change.” Clark dropped the cigarette into the mug.

Preston took a deep breath. “I’d rather have slums than have a bunch of automatons like you see in the newsreels.”

Clark didn't reply. He picked up the coffee mugs and emptied the percolator's grinds into a paper bag. He'd wash the mugs and the coffeemaker when the bathroom was unoccupied. They finished dressing and prepared to head over to the dining hall for breakfast.

There was a knock on the door. Clark checked to see if he left any incriminating evidence. "Who goes?" Clark asked.

"Newman, open up."

Clark opened the door. "Nice to see that you've managed to get on the same schedule as the rest of us."

For the first three weeks, Brent Newman had been consistently out of step, claiming he was unaccustomed to Northern time. "It's really too bad that comedy isn't a major at this institution, Johnson." Newman adjusted the knot of his tie. "If it was, you'd skip the first three years and proceed to senior status."

Clark and Brent had become close friends. Preston assumed they were drawn together by their mutual dislike for New York. Clark retrieved the paper bag, placing it in the right pocket of his sport jacket. He held the door open, allowing Preston and Newman to exit. As he locked the door, Clark secretly placed a toothpick between the door and jam to alert him if someone had entered the room. As a rule, he was back from class before Preston. If delayed, he was sure that Preston wouldn't notice if the toothpick fell to the floor.

The trio descended the steps. At the bottom, the house vexation was leaning against the spindles of the banister. "Good morning gentlemen," Price uttered cordially. "I do hope that you have a profitable day. The secrets of the world are there for you to decipher."

Chapter 11

NEW YORK, NY SEPTEMBER 1938

WITH DAVE PERFECTING THEIR COMMUTE to Manhattan, Paul settled into a groove. The forecast in the *Times* called for cool and rainy weather. Dave looked up to view the ominous clouds floating toward the city. “Paulie, I may not know much about meteorology, but this sky doesn’t look like a little rain. I’ve never seen a sky change like *this*. Only a few minutes ago, the clouds were light and puffy. Now, they’re like charcoal.”

“David, as my mother says, you’re not made out of sugar, so you’re not going to melt. Let’s get going, or we won’t make our eight o’clock class.”

The subway was jammed. The changing sky drove pedestrians underground. Paul became impatient as a train screeched to a halt. It was the second totally full train to stop at the 21st Street station since they passed through the turnstiles. “Cohen, as soon as the doors open, start pushing. I’ll follow like a halfback.”

Miraculously, they made it inside but finding a seat was impossible. They leaned against the side of the car. Dave opened his math book and reviewed his homework. “Did you figure out these problems?” Dave asked. “I don’t know why I signed up for calculus.”

“The reason is very simple, you had to take a math course. Do you want to see what I did?” Paul replied.

“Yeah, I’ll trade you the newspaper for the correct answers,” Dave said.

The exchange was made as the train swayed, causing the lights to blink several times. It became harder and harder to look at the headlines. The Germans continued to wave their sabers. The news from Hungary wasn’t encouraging either. Hungarian President Hoarthy, on his way to Berlin to

confer with Hitler, was looking for a deal to get a share of Czechoslovakia if and when the Nazis made their move.

Exasperated, Dave asked, “Who helped you with these equations? I can’t understand how you can comprehend this subject.” With a desire to become an attorney, math and science were courses he viewed as a waste of valuable time. The Cohen family had a deep history of social activism. Dave believed that by practicing law, he could make a difference fighting the injustices faced by the working masses. Cohen was by no means a communist, but many of his ideas definitely were socialist. Rising through the ranks, his parents became leaders in the organized labor movement of the garment industry. By working sixty hours a week, it was possible to raise a weekly wage from \$4.50 to the unheard of sum of \$14. They had witnessed the horror of the Triangle Shirt Company fire in March, 1911 that resulted in the deaths of 147 workers trapped by locked exits and fire escapes. Triangle was vilified as an example of how businesses exploited young female Italian and Jewish immigrants. Sweatshops were targeted and exposed, pushing the state assembly to pass legislation providing some worker protection.

Paul wasn’t sure the path of study he wanted to take. There was no question of his ability in math and science and he entertained the possibility of medicine. Choosing a major was a little premature. The daily news reports caused distress in the Brooklyn community where there wasn’t one family that didn’t have relatives overseas. Almost all of his parent’s friends had come to the United States to escape the hatred of the *shtetles*, the poor towns of Eastern Europe. For years, the main topic of conversation concerned the difficulties of assimilation into American society. Now, thoughts were dominated with fears of German conquest and persecution. Paul was a realist—war was on the horizon and he would be in the army.

The train lurched to a stop outside Washington Square. “I may need a tutor for math. Do you want the job?” Dave asked.

Paul was looking at the overhead advertisement for the new Edward G. Robinson picture *I Am the Law*. “I’ve got enough to do for myself, but let me think about it. Besides, you might not find me an easy teacher.”

“What did the Yankees do yesterday?” Dave asked.

“Who cares what they did? The Dodgers lost in Chicago 5-3. I think they’re dead,” Paul said.

“I myself don’t give a shit what the Yankees do,” Dave said, “but Sarah Greenbaum does.”

“Is she the girl from the Bronx, the one in our political science class?”

“The one and the same,” Dave grabbed the sports section. “A real baseball nut.”

The train started rolling to its destination. The doors opened and the throng spilled onto the platform, the current sweeping them toward the exit. Classes didn’t begin for another twenty minutes, allowing for a quick cup of coffee at Danny’s on the Square.

Danny’s was a little hole in the wall on the east side of Washington Square kept alive by the campus trade. Cigarette smoke wafted through the open door. Paul and Dave angled themselves to the counter. Dave tried to order two regular coffees but was ignored. The burly counterman finally poured two mugs and placed them on the stained and scratched wood counter. Thirty years of resting elbows had burnished the finish to a fine patina.

Paul claimed two unoccupied stools at the window ledge. “Don’t just sit there, take one of these,” Dave said, holding out the steaming mugs. “They’re taking the skin off my hands. I’m amazed the mugs don’t melt.”

“My theory is scalding coffee toughens the lining of the stomach, thereby allowing consumption of the entrees on the menu,” Paul explained.

Looking through the greasy smoke-streaked window, they surveyed the activity in Washington Square Park. The normal crowd rapidly thinned as heavy dark clouds drifted over. Sudden high gusts of wind sucked discarded newspapers from trashcans, plastering the wire fence surrounding the seesaws with newsprint. Paul checked his watch. “It’s ten minutes to eight, by the looks of that sky, it might as well be midnight. We better get moving.”

The building entrance was only three hundred yards across the park. Dave’s ever-present Dodger’s cap was ripped from his head and sent flying toward the fountain in the middle of the square. It disappeared from sight.

The cornerstone of the Commerce, Accounts, and Finance building read 1900. The building showed its age. While the Depression caused a monetary crisis in the city, the university wasn’t lacking for funds. A decision was made by the board of governors to curtail cosmetic

renovations until the economic despair of the city's population was assuaged. Maintenance was done only to prevent building code violations.

Room 404 was a huge amphitheater capable of seating five hundred, with lectern and three movable black boards. "Welcome to Calculus 101" was still visible on the top of the middle board.

Paul knew they stayed too long in the coffee shop. They were off to the side where it was difficult to see the middle board, the favorite of Dr. Ina Goldsmith. Goldsmith, entering her 26th year of teaching *Calc I*, appeared to be as bored as her students.

Observing the welcome message, Dave said, "It's the same message that the Indians sent to Custer at Little Big Horn."

"Compared to you, Custer had a better chance," Paul whispered back.

Dr. Goldsmith approached the lectern and proceeded to explain the previous homework assignment before covering the next topic. Dave began to squirm in his seat. Not one of the answers she chalked on the board resembled his. He glanced at Paul and placed his hands together like he was praying, except that he was begging.

A collective sigh reverberated through the hall as the clock approach the hour of ten. Bodies struggled to rise from their wooden cells, with arms and legs stretching in all directions. Paul led the way to the exit left of the lectern. The narrow corridor was lined with faculty offices, and most importantly, the men's room. For the last thirty minutes of class, Paul needed to use the facilities. He swore to himself that he would stay away from Danny's coffee.

While waiting, Dave checked the sports page for the Yankee score: 5-2 over the White Sox. Gehrig and DiMaggio accounted for all five runs. He had to face the fact that the Yankees were going to win the American league pennant again. They were fun to watch, great entertainment. His Brooklyn Dodgers were also entertainment, some said a mystery. The question each year was how close to the cellar would they finish. The suspense for the current campaign was over: the "Bums" would wind up in seventh place out of eight.

Paul rejoined Dave at the end of the hall. "I've got to get over to Brown for English Comp. I'll meet back at the cafeteria around 12:20."

"I'm glad I have to stay in the building for German. Try not to drown, it's pouring."

Paul went down the back staircase, entering the main rotunda. He left Brooklyn without a raincoat or umbrella. The forecast said nothing about a downpour. Brown Hall was two blocks over on Green Street. Cutting Comp wasn't such a bad idea, except a critical analysis of *Homer's Odyssey* was due. He put his jacket over his head and walked down the street.

Paul paused to read the bronze plaque commemorating the sacrificed lives of the Triangle fire, which proudly proclaimed that Clark Brown had donated the building to the university in 1929. It was considered an architectural marvel at nine stories with a high-speed Otis Elevator part of the central design. Classrooms and lecture halls were located on floors 2-6, with faculty offices occupying the remaining space. The building faced an easterly direction, and an attempt was made to utilize the sunlight by having the facade composed of large windows. Brown sorely required a facelift. A petition was posted on a bulletin board demanding at least a coat of paint to lighten up the gloomy interior.

Paul managed to navigate the two blocks staying under storefront canopies. As usual, out of four elevators, three were under repair, and the fourth completely mobbed. He decided to climb the four flights. Paul handed his paper to Professor Florence Grill then took a seat in the second row. The room quickly filled, and the discussion of *Homer's Odyssey* continued. Paul watched the sky turn from gray to midnight black. Dr. Grill also noticed the change, deciding that ninety minutes was enough for the day.

"Ladies and gentlemen, if you look to your left, you will see a sight that might depict what the end of the world will look like. The assignment is to read the next five chapters. No matter what the United States Weather Bureau has forecast for today, I suggest you consider going home or wherever you wish to ride out this storm."

The off-hour dismissal afforded Paul an opportunity to ride an elevator to the ground floor. He checked the student activity bulletin board: The N.Y.U. basketball team was scheduled to play Columbia Friday night at home, one of the biggest basketball games of the season. Ten cents admission. Proceeds to be used for new uniforms. Czech students were to hold a rally against German aggression that afternoon at four.

Paul meandered to the windows at the right side of the main doors. The left windows were plastered with flyers for the student government election.

He didn't know any of those running. The freshman class had a slate of four to pick from—all from the Bronx. They might as well have been from Louisiana. The rain was hard and steady.

It was futile to keep under the awnings on the way back to the Commerce building. Covering his head with his jacket, the wind-driven rain smashed his face. Umbrellas were either turned inside out or ripped out of hands. Roth's Deli provided refuge from the storm. Intending to buy lunch at the cafeteria, Paul decided to order a corned beef sandwich to go.

With the severe weather, the usual lunch crowd was non-existent. Paul was the only customer. He removed his sopping wet jacket and dried his face with a napkin. From a radio behind the counter, the Andrew Sisters were singing their hit song *B'Mir Mis Du Schoen*. The CBS announcer warned the audience to stay tuned for an important announcement. "That bastard Chamberlain has gone back to Munich to talk to Hitler. The English and the French are selling out the Czechs," Louis Roth spat.

"Only the other day, the British warned Hitler it would be war if he moved against the Czechs," Paul said. "How did everything change so fast?"

"It is very simple. The French and English have allowed their armies to turn to shit. Deladier and Chamberlain don't have the balls to stand up to that Nazi bastard," Lou said as he wrapped the sandwich in wax paper. "I forgot to ask, do you want a sour or a new pickle."

"I'll take the sour," Paul said, putting his jacket on.

Roth handed Paul the sandwich and pointed to the store's window. "Be careful."

Paul placed the sandwich into his book bag and ventured back onto the sidewalk. Violent gales rattled the windows. Finding it almost impossible to walk against the wind, he moved from doorway to doorway between blasts. The seven-minute walk turned into a half-hour. Paul skipped going back to Commerce and proceeded straight to the cafeteria located in the student lounge.

Dave waved from a corner near the Coke machine. "My God, you're going to get pneumonia."

"I've been taking a leisurely stroll through the park, and I decided to take in the sights from a bench near the arch on Fifth Avenue." Paul put his bag down and carefully removed the wax paper prize.

Dave's mouth watered as he inhaled the aroma. He looked down at his jelly sandwich. "You wouldn't consider sharing some of that precious creation with your good buddy?"

"I risked my life for this sandwich. First, you beg me to tutor math, now you beg for my sandwich. This is starting to become a one sided relationship."

The other members of the table broke out in laughter. Dave turned to a petite brunette to his left. "Sarah Greenbaum, allow me to introduce my best friend Paul Rothstein."

Paul looked squarely at Dave then pushed his sandwich to the other side of the table. Dave tore off a quarter. "Don't push your luck old buddy and eat any more of my lunch," Paul warned as he left to go to the soda machine.

"Paul Rothstein, you're an ingrate," Dave yelled.

Paul returned with two ice-cold bottles of Coke, handing one to Sarah. "How come we haven't met before?" Sarah flirted, dressed in a navy blue skirt and light gray sweater that accentuated her figure.

"The answer is simple, I'm a *putz*," Paul stammered. Turning serious, he continued, "Chamberlain is in Munich to talk to Hitler again."

Dave grabbed his copy of the *Times*. "There's no mention of a trip in today's paper."

Paul told them what transpired in Roth's Deli. The topic of conversation became the grand sellout of the Czech democracy. Their heads were turned by the sound of a crash made by a garbage can slamming into a window.

"Does anyone know what is happening with this storm?" Sarah asked. "This morning, the radio said there was a chance of rain. It looks like we're having a hurricane."

"The wind gusts must be 75-100 miles per hour," Dave said. The rain pounded the windows. "We don't need anymore water. The paper says we've already had four inches this month."

"This is Dean Lyman," broke from the public address system. "A hurricane is moving up the coast. Long Island is going to bear the brunt of the storm before it turns toward New England. Local news is reporting power outages and street flooding. Classes for the remainder of the day are cancelled. Buildings will remain open for both faculty and students if travel is deemed too hazardous."

Despite the downpour, Paul, Dave and Sarah decided to go home. The subway system was inviolate; it always ran. They made the trek through the park, stepping around tree limbs strewn along the walkways. Water cascaded down the steps to the subway. People climbing up the staircase told them that the tracks were flooded. The trio continued downward, wanting to see for themselves. Three feet of standing water occupied the tracks. The token booth cashier announced the entire system was shut down.

With many of the streets under water, bus service was, for all practical purposes, non-existent. There really was only one choice, return to the student union center and wait out the storm.

The entrance to the center was deserted but for a maintenance man mopping the floor. Wind driven rain had found its way under the double doors and fanned across the marble floor.

"I thought we'd have to elbow our way in," Dave said as he scouted the hall leading to the cafeteria.

Sarah slipped on the wet floor and was stopped short of landing on her rear end by Paul who caught her by the waist. "It's like an ice skating rink," he said, helping Sarah stand up.

"Thanks for saving my *tuchas*," she said with a laugh as she locked eyes momentarily with Paul who still had his hands on her waist.

"The place is deserted," Dave called out, drawing their attention. "Let's go to the lounge."

Paul awkwardly removed his hands from Sarah's waist. Embarrassed, he changed the subject. "He runs ahead on the subway too."

Fifty feet past the entrance to the cafeteria, Dave made a right and disappeared. Paul and Sarah peeked into the cafeteria. "Are we the smart ones for staying or the chickens that did?" Paul asked. The maximum occupancy was three hundred. There were four very unhappy faces congregating around the Coke machine.

Sarah didn't answer. Instead, she slipped her arm under Paul's. Benny Goodman's *Sing Sing Sing* came loud and clear through the opened door. The lounge, half the size of the cafeteria, afforded a collection of armchairs, sofas, a billiards table and a juke box that rarely worked.

Four males known to spend more time in a pool hall off Washington Square than in class were attempting to play a game of eight ball. A stream

of curses and laughs drifted from the far left hand corner of the lounge as balls encountered the ripped and shredded green felt on the playing surface.

Paul counted twelve others spread around the room either sleeping or reading. The music wasn't coming from the jukebox. "Mr. Rothstein and Miss Greenbaum!" rang out.

Paul and Sarah froze. The voice belonged to their political science professor. To the right of the entrance, two green plaid sofas positioned in an "L" arrangement were complimented with a pair of wingback armchairs covered in a haphazard floral pattern. A walnut coffee table completed the ensemble. Dave was nestled into one of the armchairs directly across from Dr. Allan Shaw who had taken over a sofa. The radio was on the counter of a refreshment kiosk. Its wire snaked between two large urns.

"Grab a cup of coffee or tea. It's on the house," Shaw said, holding up a steaming mug. His class was the most requested section in *PoliSci I*. In his mid-forties, Shaw walked with a pronounced limp of his right leg. A jagged facial scar running from under his chin to his right ear added an element of intrigue to his husky voice and chiseled features. Lectures peppered with jokes and an occasional four-letter word assured full attendance.

Dave looked uncomfortable, his Brooklyn bravado evaporated with Shaw's beckoning to have a seat with the wave of his ever-present bent briar pipe. The day before, Shaw peppered him with questions that the future lawyer couldn't answer. Dave nervously ran a finger around the lip of his coffee cup. The new arrivals removed their jackets and draped them over the arms of a nearby sofa. "Fire Island has been leveled," Dave said, turning to Shaw.

Shaw nodded in the affirmative as he tamped the smoldering pipe tobacco with his finger. "A few minutes ago, NBC reported there are widespread power and phone outages throughout the region. One hundred fifty three of the one hundred seventy nine houses on the beach at Westhampton, Long Island were swept away. Fire Island wasn't as lucky. Every structure is gone."

"How many dead?" Paul asked.

Shaw sighed deeply. "Twenty-nine. Have to be scores more."

"What's going on in Brooklyn near Sheepshead Bay?" Paul asked. "I'm going to call home."

"Forget it," Dave said, "The phones are dead."

"I've got to call home, my parents are going to be crazy," Sarah said.

Dave shook his head. "Can't get through to the Bronx either. I tried my cousin who lives near Yankee stadium."

"Get a cup of coffee and relax," Shaw said, pointing his pipe to the coffee urns. "The train tunnels out to New Jersey are flooded. I'll be spending the night here."

"Dr. Shaw!" boomed from one of the miscreants at the pool table. "Want to play a rack?"

"Maybe later," Shaw answered with a wave of his pipe. He was one of the few faculty members who ventured into the student union. His ability to handle a cue stick against the ivory balls as well as to the side of a human skull was honed in the hardscrabble section of Manhattan known as Hell's Kitchen, "when I get the urge to whip your ass."

Paul and Sarah helped themselves to coffee and settled down on the unoccupied sofa to Shaw's left. Sarah, shivering in her wet clothes, sipped the hot coffee. She removed her only pair of dress pumps. "Dr. Shaw, are you finished reading the paper?" she asked. A disheveled edition of *The Daily News* lay on the couch next to the professor.

"Not mine," Shaw said, wrinkling his nose at the notion that he'd read the tabloid. He handed her the paper.

Sarah stuffed two sheets of newspaper into each shoe in an attempt to dry them out.

It was 2:15, and it was obvious that the storm had developed into a hurricane of a magnitude not seen in the history of the United States Weather Bureau. Shaw flinched and turned ghostly pale as a metal trashcan slammed into the brick façade above the lounge windows overlooking a small courtyard. The few trees growing in the courtyard were pruned of their branches by the howling winds.

The storm played havoc with reception as static drowned out the NBC announcer. After a few minutes, NBC went off the air. Shaw tuned the radio to CBS. "CBS put up an experimental antenna on top of the Empire State Building," he explained. The announcer came in loud and clear. "The other stations coming out of the Jersey meadowlands must be swamped."

A couple of the snoozers and readers ventured over to listen to the storm updates. The hurricane moving northward had killed 250 in Connecticut. The death toll from the killer storm was expected to rise to 700. Thousands

were injured, more than 63,000 left homeless with property damage estimated at \$382 million.

“And that’s the good news,” Shaw said as he limped to the kiosk to pour another cup of coffee. “Ed Murrow and Bill Shirer will be on the air from Europe. I hope we’ll be able to hear them.”

All eyes followed Shaw as he walked back to the couch. “There’s a storm blowing through our neck of the woods now,” he said in a controlled bellow, “but a storm is ready to move through Europe, a storm that will affect the continent and work its way to the United States.”

Shirer reported from Prague that a deal had been brokered by the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain: The Germans would occupy the Sudeten part of the country the next day. The mood in the city was one of utter disbelief. The man on the street couldn’t fathom how the British had capitulated on the issue, and the French followed suit. It came as no surprise. Three days prior, Chamberlain said, “If we have to fight, it must be on larger issues than this.”

From London, Murrow reported that Chamberlain proclaimed the pact with Hitler was “a peace with honor, I believe it is peace for our time.”

The room fell into silence as Shaw limped to the kiosk with his coffee cup and shut off the radio. He rested an elbow on the counter. “Mr. Cohen. What do you think about the British and French giving Germany a free hand?”

Staring at the floor, Dave looked up. “Hitler judged the French and the British correctly. They didn’t act two years ago when he occupied the Ruhr.”

“You Americans don’t appreciate the European experience,” a voice from behind them said in a British accent.

Shaw took a sip from his cup as he looked at the tall and lanky Britt with fire engine red hair. “Don’t be a stranger.” He pointed to empty seats on either side of Paul and Dave. “Mr.?”

“Lyle Richardson,” he answered as he gathered a black leather book bag and an expensive looking tweed sport jacket from a bistro table. Richardson loped around the sofa where Paul and Sarah sat and eased into the vacant armchair. “I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

“We welcome your input,” Shaw said. “Please continue.”

“The horror of the Great War is seen in the casualty figures that are in the millions. There isn’t an English town or village that doesn’t have an amputee or a gas victim. In one respect, I understand Mr. Chamberlain’s attempt to avoid military action, but I also hear Mr. Churchill who said today that this is the beginning of the day of reckoning.”

“You...,” Shaw began to say.

“I have one more thing to add,” Richardson interrupted. “You Americans came into the fray after the bulk of the massacre had already taken place. Yes, you took casualties, but you emerged from the war as heroes, the saviors of democracy. War to you is Teddy Roosevelt and his charge up San Juan Hill, a jolly good time. America doesn’t appreciate the other side.”

Shaw banged the cup on the counter. He returned to the sofa. Without a word, he rolled up his right pant leg and removed his artificial limb. A white stump sock covered his knee. Shaw stood the prosthesis on the coffee table. “Belleau Wood—June 1, 1918. My leg and my face. Do you want to go over it again Mr. Richardson, how war is abstract to Americans?”

The embarrassed Englishman didn’t answer. Sarah joined the discussion. “I have a cousin who lives in Hamburg and is pregnant with her first baby. The Nazis have decreed by their Nuremberg Laws what names can be used for Jewish children. The Nazis have made it against the law for Jews to work or own property, dooming the Jewish community to groveling and begging. What a world to bring a child into.” She began to cry and reached into her bag for a handkerchief.

Sarah struck a nerve. Those following the discussion looked away. The lounge took on an eerie silence but for the rain hitting the windows.

Shaw put his prosthesis back on and re-lit his pipe, “Mr. Rothstein, in the month we have been in class, you’ve been almost silent. I have the feeling something is waiting to jump out.”

“Maybe the accounts of Nazi persecution are too remote, coming from over thirty-five hundred miles away,” Paul said, leaning forward on the sofa. “The Japanese have been killing Chinese for years, and what has the United States done? Sell them more scrap iron to make bombs and bullets. I’m afraid that it will take the killing of Americans for the isolationists to pull their collective heads out of the sand.”

Shaw drummed his fingers on the table. “Paul, do you have any idea how the plight of the German Jews can be made tangible for the majority of

Americans?”

Paul contemplated the question for a few moments. “I hate to say it, but the fate of the German Jew is out of our hands. They’re finished.”

The driving rain began to slacken as the fast moving storm left the area. It was almost 6:30. Into the lounge walked Jake, wearing the waterproof suit he used on the docks. “Are you ready to come home, little brother?” he asked.

“There’s flooding everywhere. How did you get here?” Paul asked

Jake stood with his hands on his hips. “Yeah, the roads are flooded, but you can get around.”

“Can we give Sarah a lift to the Bronx?” Paul asked.

Jake looked at the shapely co-ed sitting next to his brother. “I bet she’s a Yankee fan,” he said with a wink. “I’ll give her a break on account of the weather.”

Chapter 12

PRINCETON, NJ OCTOBER 1938

THE CAMPUS WAS ABUZZ with the morning announcement of a brokered agreement between the university and the Student Debate Council. Preston's afternoon composition course ended early, allowing the few minutes walk from the McCosh lecture complex to Whig Hall, where the details of the agreement were being discussed.

Whig Hall housed the American Whig Society and the Clisophic Society. The two debating clubs formed an alliance and were in discussion with the University Committee for Public Lectures. With the news out of Europe becoming more dramatic every day, the students wanted a say in the selection of outside speakers for the yearly lecture series.

Preston looked for his roommate Clark among the throng outside the building. Clark became active with the Whigs at the beginning of the term. Traditionally, freshmen were treated like children. He had taken the Whig's position as a personal affront, maintaining he had as much right to be a policymaker as the upper classmen.

Stretching his six-foot, two-inch frame, Preston located his roommate over the crowd. Pushing through the rows, he moved beside him. "So my doubting roommate, what do you have to say now?" Clark asked, grinning like the Cheshire cat. "You declared for the university when we started this fight. It's lucky you're not a betting man. This is just the beginning of change in the thinking around here."

The crowd became impatient waiting for Professor Miles Brown and Thomas Sinclair to come out of Whig. The two emerged twenty minutes later. Brown, carrying a portfolio, raised his right hand in an attempt to gain quiet from the boisterous crowd. "We have concluded our discussions and

I'm pleased to announce the inclusion of the debating clubs in the decision making process."

Taking his cue, Thomas Sinclair stepped forward and addressed his classmates. "Woodrow Wilson introduced the preceptorial system to encourage interaction between faculty and students. This agreement is an outgrowth of his ideas. It is my belief that a new era has been launched with the aim of uniting our campus community."

A wave of applause descended from the audience, prompting Sinclair and Brown to shake hands and take a bow. As the crowd dispersed, Clark turned to Preston. "A group of us are going to go to the Balt for a bite. Do you want to come along?"

The Balt was the nickname for the Baltimore Dairy Lunch. Located on Nassau Street, it was a popular spot for students and truck drivers. The reasons were simple—it was affordable and open twenty-four hours. "I could use a break from the dining hall. I'll meet you after I drop my books at the dorm," Preston said.

Preston walked across Cannon Green where preparations for a Halloween bonfire were underway. Ghosts and goblins hung from trees on the perimeter. Three caskets sat next to a delivery van. As Preston climbed the steps to Albert Hall, raucous laughter spilled through the opened door. The lobby was filled with residents; many were holding their sides. Ellis Price shouted at Brent Newman, "Who's responsible for this insult? In all my years, I haven't witnessed such a disrespectful exhibition such as this." The house manager had shed his well-rehearsed cool demeanor.

Newman attempted to maintain his composure, but his voice became louder with every word. "I told you, I *didn't* have anything to do with this. Just because I'm friendly with Swedge and Johnson, doesn't give you the right to include me in your assumptions. As a Southern gentleman, sir, I am offended and shocked." Newman's remarks resulted in another round of laughter at Price's expense.

With Preston moving to the center of the room, the noise rapidly subsided. Price glowered at him. "Is this your handy work, Mr. Swedge?"

With the movement of a matador, Ellis Price whisked the cover off the object of his tirade. A large pumpkin had been painted with his face. Whoever did the art work had produced a masterpiece. An unidentified voice belted from the rear, "Pumpkin Price."

Preston looked at the pumpkin and then at Price. The sneer of the pumpkin matched Price down to his dimpled chin. Preston began to laugh, and the lobby once again exploded. "While I would like to take credit for the distinctive qualities of the grand squash, I cannot. I have problems with stick figures."

As Preston climbed the staircase, Price gave him something to take to his room, "I'm a very patient person. One day, you or Johnson is going to make a mistake, and I will be there. We'll see who has the last laugh."

Newman walked up with Preston. "Great! Completely great! I didn't have the faintest idea you could draw."

"I can't, and I didn't do it," Preston said seriously. "That's the truth. I'm going to meet Clark at the Balt. Do you want to come?"

They dropped their books in their rooms and met back in the hall. Congratulations were offered to Preston as they went downstairs. Price had removed the evidence. "I bet the pumpkin is locked in a closet," Preston said.

"Someone better watch his ass. The little shrimp is really mad," Newman cautioned.

They left the dorm and walked to Witherspoon Street passing through the Fitz Randolph Gateway. In 1905, a local attorney financed the installation of the wrought iron arch in memory of Dean Nathaniel Fitz Randolph. It became the official entrance of the university.

The Balt was always busy, and that day was no exception. Seated at a large table in the rear, were Clark Johnson, Thomas Sinclair, and two members of the Whig society Preston didn't know. Clark made the introductions, telling Preston and Newman to grab chairs and sit down.

Preston slapped Johnson on the back. "Partner, you've totally ingratiated yourself with Ellis Price. The boys of the house have reserved space for you at The Museum of Modern Art."

Clark smiled at Preston's remarks. "I don't have the slightest idea what you're crediting me for, but if Price is pissed off, then it must be terrific." Preston and Newman filled in the details of what had happened. Clark couldn't contain himself, almost choking on his coffee. Preston couldn't tell if his protest of innocence was the truth. When dealing with the Detroit native, he had learned to be cautious.

Orange and black Princeton Tiger Halloween decorations hung from ceiling fans, giving the appearance of a pack slowly parading across the ceiling. The table was awash with excitement. The day's event at Whig Hall provided fuel for thought: what direction was the accord between students and faculty to take?

Thomas Sinclair, bored by the classics of Shakespeare and Milton, suggested a focus on the new age writers. "I want Hemingway, Lawrence, and Rand. I want the alive, not the dead. It's perfectly fine to study the masters, but the pace of world events behooves us to live for the now."

The waitress automatically carried five glasses of Coke to the table. The order—five burgers and five fries. She picked up the menus and disappeared behind the stainless steel counter. The order was sent into the kitchen by a basic intercom system; she yelled across the pass-through, "5 and 5"

The short order cook lived up to his title. The waitress was back within seven minutes. "Economic reform is still the overriding issue. The Depression isn't over, and the South won't recover without new ideas," Newman said, opening a catsup bottle. "I've read about this fellow John Kenneth Galbraith. He's new, revolutionary, and dynamic."

Preston reached for a napkin in a chrome canister. Wiping his mouth, he turned to Clark. "Since you were pushing for this deal, let me hear what's on your mind."

Clark sipped on his Coke. "Literature and economics are areas to consider. However, my concern is physics."

"I haven't heard you ever say the word physics since I met you," Preston said. "What in hell are you talking about?"

The seniors stared at Clark, waiting for an explanation. "Preston, do you take everything in the literal sense? My understanding of physics is limited to gravity. All objects exert a gravitational force on other objects. The larger the object, the greater the pull. When is the last time you Knights of the Round Table have looked at the map of the world? The European landmass is larger than the United States. It's this gravitational effect that I am concerned with. I'm afraid that this country is going to be pulled into another European war. Americans will die in places they can't even pronounce."

Tommy Shikiro, a Japanese-American friend of Sinclair, held his hand up to his forehead to emphasize his disbelief. Shikiro flashed an exaggerated toothy smile. "Tell me if I am wrong, but politics isn't where we want to go. Who are you to think that you can suddenly appear and push this trash down our throats? Maybe we should reconsider freshman participation."

"Gentlemen, we have to be open to suggestions. That's what debate is all about," Sinclair said, trying to be a calming influence.

Peter Thomas, nephew of William Randolph Hearst, was following the family path with a major in journalism. "My uncle has made his feelings felt through his newspapers. I don't always agree with him, but isolationism is the wave that is flowing across this country. We should consider what Johnson is talking about. Sorry Robert, but I would like to hear him through."

Shikiro rose from his seat. "I'm not interested in what he has to say, and I'll fight his political agenda and any others." He banged seventy-five cents on the table. "That should cover my part of the bill. I have better things to do."

Clark smirked. "There's no question that Roosevelt wants to align this country with Britain. The industrialists want to profit from war production, and the Jews try to influence him. The Jewish wing of the Democratic Party places its brethren in Germany above the interests of the United States. Jewish money can buy a sympathetic ear in Washington. Roosevelt is a political animal constantly monitoring which way the wind is blowing. If a strong enough gale can be sent to Washington, he might be made to sit on the sideline. The one person who has the power and the medium to present a case to the American public is Father Charles Coughlin. We should inquire if he is available."

Hearst finished a bite of his burger. "I agree with keeping the United States out of the next European war, but why bring Coughlin here? The man plays to the fears of his listeners, spewing vicious hatred as he hides behind his cleric's collar."

Clark waited for Hearst to finish. "His broadcasts are listened to by at least ten million people on a Sunday, and he receives on the average ten thousand letters everyday. Father Coughlin is a force to be reckoned with."

Preston checked his watch; the bonfire was about to be lit. They needed to wind up the impromptu meeting. "One thing bothers me about Coughlin.

There are people who keep their dislike for Jews and Negroes to themselves. Then they hear Coughlin on Sunday, go to work on Monday, and say as they open their lunch pails, 'I must be right, the Father thinks the same way.' ”

Red wisps of the bonfire streamed to the sky. Cheerleaders led the crowd in singing the Tiger fight song, bringing the green alive with cheers of approval. The festivities drew people from Nassau Street, creating a curious mix of Tigers and kids from the Princeton Elementary School down the street. Barrels of apple cider, doughnuts, and candy were available for the taking. Suddenly the tops of the caskets flung open. Screams reverberated off buildings lining the square as ghoulish figures chased the kids, and in an instant, they reversed roles and were chasing the monsters. Monsters and children lay on the ground exhausted.

Clark and Preston decided to return to the dorm. “Whatever you do, keep your temper in check,” Preston warned. “Price is going to start with us the moment we open the door.”

Price was standing by the staircase with his arms crossed as if he had turned to stone. “Do you know where I can buy a good pumpkin pie?” Clark asked. Preston tried not to laugh, but one glance at Price, ended what little self-control he had.

Approaching the second floor landing, Price called to them, “Johnson, if it takes a lifetime, I’ll make sure that you curse this day.”

Clark could see Price through the banister. “Let him boil,” Clark whispered.

The doorframe was plastered with notes congratulating Johnson for his great work. He was becoming a legend, not only in the dorm, but also around the campus. Besides listening to Father Coughlin, Clark looked forward to the *Mercury Theater of the Air* with Orson Welles. He turned his radio on. Instead of Orson Wells, there was a dance band playing.

“What the hell is Ramon Raquello playing Stardust for? *Mercury Theater* is supposed to be on,” Clark said.

“Maybe there’s trouble with the show, maybe Welles ate himself sick, or maybe you’ve got the wrong station,” Preston said.

Clark fiddled with the dial and returned to the program. “It’s on CBS, this has got to be what’s on.”

An announcer broke in with a news bulletin that a meteorite had crashed not far from Princeton, killing an estimated 1,500 people. “Did you hear an explosion? What’s he talking about?” Clark exclaimed.

They weren’t the only ones to hear the news flash. Pandemonium broke out in the dorm. Residents ran around knocking on doors. When a second bulletin reported the local police had amended the initial report to the object was not a meteor, but a large metal cylinder originating from Mars. The cylinder had opened, releasing creatures armed with death rays.

Panic was everywhere. Clark ran down the steps and out to the green. Armed with shotguns, campus police emerged from the safety office. Barricades were erected to prevent access to campus streets.

Clark’s geology professor, Dr. Arthur Buddington, ran out of Gyt Hall. “Johnson, you’re coming with me,” the mid-fifties professor wearing blue jeans and work boots ordered. “The report said the meteorite landed in Grovers Mills. We’re going to take a look. I have shovels and specimen bags in my car.”

Preston stayed by the radio. An announcer broadcasting from Grovers Mills described how the Martians were firing ray guns at anyone or anything that moved. Suddenly, there was silence. CBS switched to the commandant of the New Jersey State Police who ordered Mercer and Middlesex counties placed under martial law.

President Roosevelt came on the air, advising people to leave the cities. In the hallway, someone yelled that they better get gas masks. Preston looked through the window at supposedly intelligent people running around in circles. Something just didn’t play true.

Clark climbed into Buddington’s 1936 Ford woody station wagon. Cars trying to leave town jammed Nassau Street. Halloween revelers were in a daze. Some were running, others sitting on the benches along the street looking as though they had resigned themselves to death. Buddington turned right onto Washington Road toward Princeton Junction. Grovers Mills was five miles east. They were going against the traffic. Any sane person was fleeing Grovers Mills, not going toward it. With their sirens screaming, police cars headed toward the landing sites.

Professor Buddington turned toward his student, “As a Princeton man, do you believe the events we’ve heard about can possibly be accurate?”

“Excuse me professor, as a Princeton man, I want to declare that I am scared shitless,” Clark said with fear in his voice.

Buddington turned up the volume on the radio. CBS was reporting the New Jersey State Police had been wiped out in the vicinity of the initial landings. New York was under attack, and that attacks were happening across the country.

They arrived in the hamlet of Grovers Mills. Cars and pedestrians headed in the direction of the town’s only park. An excited crowd, approximately one hundred fifty people, wandered looking for Martians or the meteor. Nothing. There was no evidence of an explosion or invasion. Spotlit by the headlights of the Ford, a shapely teenage girl decked out in a white sweater and blue jeans, was talking to a policeman. As Clark and Buddington got out of the station wagon, Clark heard her say, “Jerry, this broadcast has to be a hoax. Nothing has happened here, or I bet anywhere else.”

Clark introduced himself and suggested that they go back to the Ford and listen to the reports of the attacks. “Don’t you get it? This is Orson Welles’s idea of a Halloween joke,” the girl said, shining her flashlight into his eyes.

The girl was Gloria St. Claire, a tomboyish senior at Mercer County Regional High School. Gloria had heard the reports and caught a ride with Jerry Reynolds, a policeman from Grovers Mills. Her father, Gordon, was police chief, and Reynolds was anxious to drive Gloria back home.

Buddington motioned Preston to return to the car. “Do you mind if I call you?” he asked. Her smile said that it was okay.

Buddington was behind the wheel. “According to the bulletins, we’re dead, and so is most of the East-Coast.” He stepped on the clutch, and slipped the car into gear. Inching down the lane, they watched the bewildered faces. Reynolds’s black and white cruiser slowed, allowing the majority of the crowd to walk ahead. As Buddington turned back onto Washington Road, an announcer came on the radio to remind the audience to stay tuned to the CBS radio network for the second half of the *Mercury Theater* following a short intermission. “I knew this was an orchestrated attempt to fool the public. I didn’t hear any explosion tonight, but I’m sure tomorrow there is going to be a real explosion when the public realizes what happened,” Buddington said.

Clark laughed. "For a couple of guys who were so sure this broadcast was just bullshit, we ran around pretty good."

"Johnson, how important is it for you to pass geology? Just kidding. Anyone who didn't hear the beginning of the show was scared senseless. The radio can be a very powerful tool. We've heard Roosevelt calm a nation on the verge of collapse because of the Depression. On the other hand, we've heard Hitler use the radio to threaten his European neighbors."

The traffic was thinning as they approached Princeton center. Nassau Street had returned to normal, however the Halloween mood seemed to have evaporated. Scary masks had been traded for somber looks. Buddington stopped at Witherspoon Street for a red light. Outside of the Balt, groups of three or four were in animated conversation.

Clark was amused. "Looks like a lot of tough guys. I bet not one of them would admit they were frightened out of their minds. I would pay the Gallup Organization to conduct a poll."

"Why don't you go over to Bank Street and make a proposal. They might pay you to find the effect on the student population. I think your hypothesis, as we say in geological jargon, is rock solid."

The light turned green. Buddington allowed the pedestrians to cross before turning into the main gate. The campus police had not completely relaxed; the yellow barricade was still across the road. The professor was easily recognized, and the blockade was slid back. "Thanks for riding out with me. Let me know what happened back at the dorm. By the way, has Ellis Price singled out anyone yet for his freshman treatment?" Buddington asked as they got out of the car.

"Price has identified his target. Actually, he has two: my roommate and me. Let's just say, he gives us a challenge. It's a game of cat and mouse."

Chapter 13

NEW YORK, NY NOVEMBER 1938

JAKE WAS RESTING ON THE SOFA reading *The New York Times* when Paul returned from school. “How’s it going Professor?” Paul shrugged his shoulders. Jake continued, “There’s an article here that says a Polish Jew living in Germany, shot and killed a Nazi diplomat in Paris. I’m glad one of them had the guts to stand up and say he wasn’t going to take it anymore.”

Paul set his books down and took the paper. “Do you really think that this Grynszpan is going to make a difference? The French have him locked up, and are going to try him for murder.”

“The Jews in Germany act like ostriches,” Jake fumed. “With their heads in the sand, they keep wishing the nightmare will disappear. The Nazis keep turning the screws and they stay silent. Ever the obedient Jews.”

Paul sat down on the divan and turned on the radio. Bill Shirer came on the air with a special report from Berlin, “Brownshirt storm troopers are attacking Jewish shops and houses of worship throughout the country. I have personally witnessed Jews being beaten and abused on the streets of the capital. Dr. Goebbels has issued a communiqué from the propaganda ministry announcing the Gestapo’s retribution against the Jews for the murder of Ernst Vom Rath in Paris: The Jews will be made to pay a fine of a billion Reichmarks atonement for Vom Rath’s death. In addition, they will be responsible for repairing all damage to their property, with owners not being able to collect on any insurance.”

Shirer continued, “I have one unconfirmed report of twenty-thousand Jews being arrested and on their way to concentration camps. The streets are covered with broken glass, and the event is being called *Kristalnacht*—

The Night of Broken Glass. Austria is reporting all of Vienna's twenty-one synagogues have been burned to the ground."

Paul switched off the radio. "What do you have to say now? Those German bastards don't need any reason for murdering Jews. Maybe violence only begets violence. For once, you might be wrong."

Jake began pacing. He was as agitated as Paul had ever witnessed. Paul knew that his brother was an idealist, not a pragmatist. He couldn't stand injustice of any kind. Jake struggled for the words he wanted to say, something equal to the horrific news they had just absorbed. "No Paul, I'm not wrong. If it wasn't this Vom Rath business, then they would have found another excuse to exercise a reign of terror."

Jake walked to the window, raising the sash for a breath of air. "What do you think about the *Bund* that has its headquarters up in Bushwick? They have the moxie to have a swastika flying on the door jam. I hear they're having a meeting tonight. Maybe it's time to give them a reason to reconsider."

"You're not thinking of going over there and breaking up the place?" Paul asked with a hint of concern.

"A group of us are meeting at Katz's Deli to figure out how to respond. Why don't you tag along, and at least you'll get a sandwich. With Mom and Pop visiting Aunt Rose in New Jersey, dinner is up to us anyway."

"Okay, I'll go, but I can't stay late," Paul hesitantly replied. "I've got studying to do for tomorrow."

They put on their jackets as they walked down the steps. Jake stopped to help a neighbor carry shopping bags into her apartment. Paul went out on the street and couldn't help thinking about his Brooklyn neighborhood where one could live his entire life never needing to leave its safe boundaries. Every necessity could be found within walking distance of the Rothstein apartment, including a hospital and a funeral home.

Jake appeared and they crossed the street, walking due east. Katz's had been a neighborhood fixture for fifty years as the business passed from one generation to the next. Corned beef was in their veins, as evident by the number of heart attacks in the Katz family.

Paul could taste the chicken soup and matzo balls with his nose as they walked through the door. Jake led the way to the back of the store where a makeshift table was supported by four pickle barrels. Out of twelve men,

Paul only recognized Hymie Shapiro, the milkman. The Rothsteins ordered corned beef sandwiches and two egg creams.

The assembly was much older than Jake. Paul guessed the average age of the collection of working stiffs was mid-fifties. Arguments for breaking the Nazi bastards' heads were made. Paul listened as he consumed his dinner, keeping his thoughts to himself. The attention of the group moved to Jake. "I asked my brother Paul to come with me tonight, because it's important for us to take the pulse of the college crowd. They're young, strong, and intelligent—a resource that must be used in any fight we will be engaged in.

Paul was more than taken aback. He didn't realize his brother expected him to be a spokesman. "I'm somewhat embarrassed in having to tell you, I haven't heard any real outrage at what is going on in Germany. The Yankees draw more discussion than the Nazis. I bet this *Kristalnacht* calamity will evoke nothing but small talk tomorrow."

Paul looked at faces that couldn't comprehend the ambivalence of the younger generation. "If you're looking for a ground swell of support, you're going to be disappointed. Until American Jews are threatened, I don't foresee any action in great numbers."

"I can't understand why you young *pischers* don't give a shit!" Sam Bernstein exploded.

"It's not that they don't give a shit, it's that the situation hasn't hit home. Some of us read letters from relatives in Europe, but they're just pieces of paper." Paul stood. "I have to get home and crack the books."

Jake stared at the table thinking of his midnight talks with his mother. Quizzed by her son on what she thought about the news from Europe, Rachel said, "It's terrible for those people. But we're a small number among many here in America and mustn't rock the boat. America has been gracious to let us in, and we Jews must remember that."

"You and Pop have worked very hard, and in your own way have made America a better place. This country was built on the backs of those speaking with an accent. But don't think for a minute that we're really accepted here. If the anti-Semites come to the conclusion that they could avoid a war with Hitler by kicking us out, we would be packing in a minute. Jews in America have got to change. We have to become fighters, protect ourselves, and take no crap from anybody."

“Jake, you get these ideas from the men you work with. They’re nothing but a bunch of gangsters. You’re becoming one of them!” she shouted.

“Yes Ma, some of them are gangsters, some are killers, but they don’t let anyone mess around with their people. The time is coming when we’ll have to trade in our prayer shawls for guns.”

Jake realized that he was daydreaming. “A few of my co-workers have supplied me with some equipment to help heat the Bund meeting hall. I understand they’ve been a little chilly. I think it’s best if we go over and take a look at the place. My friends advised me to make sure this auxiliary heater would be the right size for the job.”

“Is this heater available for installation this evening?” Lou Ginsberg asked.

Jake nodded in the affirmative. “I just have to call the supply house, and we’ll get immediate delivery.”

They split into two groups, with Jake riding with Sam Bernstein. Moe Feinberg, a pattern maker in the Manhattan’s garment center, chauffeured the others. The Bushwick section of Brooklyn had been the location for more than a dozen breweries. All changed with Prohibition and the shift to produce soda and near-beer.

The repeal of the Volstead Act didn’t fill the void left by the Queens migration. The old brewery area remained dilapidated, populated by the disenfranchised and impoverished. The Bund was located on Schaefer Street, a community populated mainly by Germans and Poles. It took about twenty minutes to navigate into the general area. With buses stopping on almost every corner, traffic slowed, not being helped by a light drizzle. It was a narrow street, paved with the original cobblestones. Jake took note—the stones were like ice when wet. As planned, they cruised by the target, with each member of the operation looking for specific details relating to security measures taken by the Bund. Jake wanted to know about lookouts and possible tails. He was warned that they kept members in cars to follow suspicious intruders.

Number 345 Schaefer Street was a two story brick and frame building standing alone with a parking lot on either side. The faded lettering spelled out Krause’s Tavern, the former occupant. A large swastika was flying at the side of the door. “In a million years, I wouldn’t ever have dreamed that I see a Brownshirt standing guard duty,” Jake said.

Bernstein slowed for a fraction of a second and then proceeded up the block, taking a right on Madison Street. He pulled to the curb behind Feinberg's black Oldsmobile. "Pick me up at 8:30 and we'll go get the transportation," Jake said as he switched cars to go over plans with Moe Feinberg.

Feinberg doubled back to Schaefer Street. Jake wanted to take another look at the target. The near empty parking lots adjacent to the building filled rapidly. "The Bund is a very popular place," Jake said. "Tonight's meeting has been advertised as a double celebration for the annexation of Czechoslovakia and Kristalnacht."

"Why don't we just shoot these bastards? It would so much easier!" Feinberg said.

"It would be easier, but if we do it my way, they'll have doubts about their own safety. I want them to worry about going into a place like this. Maybe their new headquarters will meet the same fate or worse," Jake replied as he waved to get going.



Jake found his brother sitting at the kitchen table with a stack of books. "By the way, how's your girlfriend?"

Paul turned a deep crimson. "What girlfriend?"

"Don't bullshit me little brother. I can tell when a guy is dopey over a dame. I'm talking about Miss Sarah Greenbaum."

"She's not my girlfriend yet, but I'm working on it."

Jake glanced down at the calculus book. "I have to go out for awhile, if I'm not back by the time you go to bed, don't put the chain on the door. I hate climbing the fire escape."

"You're afraid of heights." Paul looked up. "Anything related to the gentlemen I met at Katz's?"

Jake moved to the refrigerator to grab a bottle of Coke. "From now on, unless I offer information, don't ask. Whatever you do, *don't* utter a syllable to Ma," he said, taking a long gulp,

Paul knew his brother well enough not to argue when he used that tone of voice. This was his business face, no screwing with him. Paul returned to his books as Jake picked up the phone. "Jake here," he said. "I need the wheels, make sure the other stuff is in the back of the truck. Thanks." He hung up.

Jake re-dialed the phone. "Nicky, the plumber needs that heater. Anthony will have the truck in half an hour. Thanks and I'll see you tomorrow."

Jake picked up his jacket and locked the door behind him. Bernstein's dark blue Chevy was parked across the street. Sam Bernstein was a sixty-three year-old lifelong butcher. His trade kept him in a physical condition that was the envy of men forty years his junior. Jake respected him for his common sense and his muscle.

"*Boichick*, you ready. Feinberg will be on Madison like before. If we don't show in twenty minutes of the rendezvous time, the gang is going to come looking for us. Moe's coming prepared: four shotguns and a bunch of baseball bats."

"I hope Moe doesn't get jumpy and blow the whole scheme," Jake said, having a few doubts.

Bernstein made his way over to the industrial section of Pennsylvania Avenue, checking his rear view mirror like he had seen Bogart do in the movies. He wasn't sure what he was looking for, but one couldn't be too careful. His reservation for the operation was that more than two people knew what was going on. It was unavoidable. There were only twelve men in the entire movement. He hoped they could control their mouths.

The Brooklyn Union Gas Company depot was deserted. Bernstein pulled the Chevy into an alley. The car was hidden behind two large cardboard boxes. Approaching a gas company truck, Jake removed two pairs of brown flannel gloves from his jacket, handing a pair to Bernstein. "Put them on, we wouldn't want to leave any pastrami traces."

Bernstein found the keys on top of the sun visor. A friend of a friend of Jake's provided the wheels and other required incidentals. Two sets of Brooklyn Union overalls were in the back. Jake opened the toolbox and lifted the tray, shining a flashlight onto a package marked "fittings." His *goomba* had a sense of humor.

Bernstein assumed his place behind the wheel, turned the key in the ignition, and the old Dodge truck purred to life. Just as they began to move,

another gas truck pulled into the depot. Jake looked away, trying to keep his face from view. "Let's get going. If those guys get an idea we're not supposed to be on duty, its curtains."

"What the hell are you talking about? Do you think they only have one crew on a shift? This company provides gas for the entire borough. Relax!" Bernstein said.

Jake eased back into the seat, gazing at the industrial buildings as Bernstein drove toward Bushwick. The traffic had thinned. He checked his watch, 8:55. They were on time to arrive at the Bund just as the festivities were scheduled to begin.

Bernstein turned onto Schaefer and eased the truck into a no parking zone. "A cop wouldn't bother with a gas company truck."

"From the looks of the block, I doubt the police patrol it," Jake said.

The adjacent parking lots were full. Bernstein looked at his young partner and gave him the thumbs up. Jake went to the rear of the truck and removed the toolbox.

A brown shirted goon stood guard at the door. "We're from the gas company," Jake announced. "There's been a report of a gas leak. We have to check the buildings beginning at the head of the main. Which way to the basement?"

"You can't barge in. Wait here," the guard said.

They waited on the front steps. A short, fat, gray haired, pseudo Nazi appeared. "I am Fritz Steiner, commander. We didn't call in a gas leak. You've come at the worst time, our meeting is about to start!"

"Listen Mac, the company's instruments have indicated falling pressure in the main line. If you want to blow up, be my guest," Bernstein said. He started to walk down the steps to the street.

"No, no, you have to do your job," Steiner said. "Come inside and I will get someone to take you down to the basement,"

Krause's Tavern had been transformed into the Munich beer hall where Hitler staged his infamous putsch. The original bar was still being used, and the revelers were lined up three deep. On the wall behind the bar hung a framed picture of Hitler. Bernstein fought to control himself, wanting to grab one of the large Nazi flags and smash the former paperhanger.

Steiner led one of his flunkies to them. "Sergeant Kress will show you the way."

Kress led them down a narrow hallway and opened the door to the basement. "It looks like you guys have been in a few basements tonight," he said looking at their filthy overalls. "If you need something, I'll be down the hall."

"Günter, we need you up front. Get your accordion," a voice called down the steps. Kress turned heels and disappeared.

Bernstein led the way, with Jake closing the door behind him. The floor was stacked with kegs of beer. "I would like to take a leak in that," Bernstein whispered as he pointed to the keg that was hooked up to the taps upstairs.

"Arsenic would be better." Jake said, carrying the tool chest to the area behind the furnace that was draped in cobwebs.

Bernstein grimaced at the sight, "I hate bugs. If I see a rat, I'm outta here."

"Don't worry, all the vermin are upstairs toasting the Führer." Jake put on his gloves, opened the tool-chest, and handed Bernstein a large open-ended wrench. The noise filtering through the floor made it difficult to hear if someone was coming down the steps. Bernstein positioned himself at the bottom of the stairs, prepared to adjust some bastard's attitude if necessary.

Jake removed the package marked "fittings." Tearing the brown Kraft wrapping paper revealed six sticks of dynamite connected to a timer. After turning the power off to the burner, Jake used a wrench to loosen the gas pipe leading to the furnace. He set the timer for eighteen minutes. Bernstein slipped his wrench into the large pocket on the right side of the overalls and climbed the steps. He peeked into the hall. The assembly was in the midst of patriotic songfest. Jake closed the door with his elbow and proceeded toward the front of the building.

Steiner was positioned near the door. "Do you gentlemen want a glass of beer?"

"We'll take a rain check. We have more stops to make," Bernstein said. "All the lines checked out. Sorry for any inconvenience we might have caused."

"I appreciate your concern for our safety. Please come back when your shift is over. The party will really be hot by then," Steiner said.

As they walked down the front steps, the guard saluted them with a "*Seig Heil*."

“You should go inside and warm up. It’s getting a little chilly,” Jake said.

Holding their breaths, they waited for the truck’s engine to start. “I’m getting too old for shit like this,” Bernstein said as he pulled away. “I hope that *putz* takes your advice and goes inside.”

“I can’t get over the fact these people have the balls to parade around in their Nazi uniforms, doing their “*Seig Heil*” routine, and wish this was Bavaria,” Jake said. “Where in the hell did they get that picture of Hitler hanging over the bar? I wonder if they have one hanging over the toilet.”

Bernstein slowly drove past the Bund hall. The guard at the door gave them a final Nazi salute. The truck turned on Knickerbocker Avenue. Bernstein watched for any tails. He hadn’t observed anything out of the ordinary, and proceeded to Madison to rendezvous with Feinberg.

Bernstein parked beside the black Oldsmobile. Feinberg rolled down his window. “In five minutes, our German friends will be taking a trip to Valhalla. Everything went smooth as glass,” Jake said. Bernstein made a U-turn to face in the direction of the expected explosion.

Jake checked his watch. One minute. “Bill, I know those bastards deserve what is about to happen, but in a way, I have mixed emotions. This is the start of something that is going to get real ugly.”

Bernstein gave him a look like he would do to his son. “Jake, we didn’t start this war. These goons look up to a madman. They’ve declared an open hunting season on our people. I’m just a common man, but I know you can’t close your eyes and make a wish that they won’t be here anymore. Vermin must be removed. We volunteered for the job.”

The black sky suddenly turned to orange-red as a fireball ascended two blocks away. Bernstein drove away, not waiting for Feinberg. Within minutes, the wails of sirens converged in the direction of Schaefer Street. Bernstein turned toward Jake. “Your *goombas* at the docks provide good equipment. Make sure you tell them how much we appreciate their help. Demolition isn’t taught in Hebrew school.”

Chapter 14

PRINCETON, NJ MAY 1939

WARM WEATHER USHERED IN THE FINAL weeks of freshman year. For Preston, the pressure of round-the-clock work was a relief compared to the previous ten days at 2365 Park Avenue, New York City.

Preston had contemplated traveling with Clark to Detroit for spring recess. However, spending a week with disciples of Father Charles Coughlin bordered on the profane. There wasn't a viable alternative; Preston went home.

Preston didn't expect to be welcomed home as a conquering hero, but being greeted by the doorman with a note from his mother wasn't something he expected either. Tearing the flap open, he removed a lilac scented card. Her choice of stationary caused him considerable consternation at the dorm. His fellow residents couldn't contain their curiosities concerning a possible girlfriend. When they realized the notes were from his mother, Preston was in for the ribbing of his short collegiate life.

He read the note, placed it into the pocket of his gray suit jacket, and proceeded to the elevator bank mildly amused. The original plans called for the chauffeur to drive from the city and take him home. His mother called the day before to say that the car was in the garage with some sort of problem she didn't understand. Would he be a love and take the train?

"Excuse me, do you know a Preston Swedge?" a female voice asked. "I understand he lives in this building."

Preston didn't turn his head— Millie Gardner, apartment 3B. "How is the Smith whiz bang?"

“Where do you come off not finding time for me on Thanksgiving and Christmas?” She set her packages on the marble floor.

Preston and Millie had been friends since they were ten-years-old. “I’m sorry,” Preston said, taking her hand. “My father can turn a holiday into my personal hell. I dread these visits, but a bit of news was delivered that’s like a stay of execution from the governor.” The elevator was holding on the ninth floor. “I busted my butt to get here and a note left with the doorman informs me my parents have departed for Connecticut and will return on Sunday.”

Millie looked at him sorrowfully. “Come for dinner. My parents would be thrilled.”

The elevator finally hit the lobby. Preston held Millie’s things, as she pressed number three. “I hope that your mother won’t be put out,” he said. The elevator car lurched to a stop. “Dinner is at six, but I know my parents would like to spend some time with you, and so would I. Come at five,” Millie said enthusiastically. “One other thing, give me the grocery bags!”

The door banged the wall, snapping Preston out of his daydream. “Partner, I’m beginning to crack up like this plaster wall. Let’s go out,” Clark said, plowing into Preston’s bedroom.

Preston, sitting with his feet propped on the desk, put down his economics book. “As long as we’re going out, I need to drop off a suit at the cleaners in Palmer Square.” He crossed the room and removed the garment from the bottom of his closet.

“We might as well stop at the Balt on the way back. All this mental exercise has increased my appetite,” Clark said.

The dorm was deathly quiet. Its occupants were either ensconced in the library or in their rooms. The denizens of Albert Hall suspended the normal mania for the duration of the term. The tension of exams expanded like steam in a boiler. If Clark was building up his appetite, then Preston was moving in the opposite direction. He had passed on breakfast and elected to stay in his room. His stomach had become a sea of semi-solid Jell-O.

Moving quickly down the steps, they entered the deserted foyer. The scent of viciousness hung in the air, but Ellis Price was nowhere to be seen nor was Preston’s copy of the Times. “Hold up a minute while I look behind the desk for my paper.” He came up empty.

"I'll buy you a paper when I get a pack of cigarettes," Clark said, snickering like a kid trying to keep a secret. Preston wouldn't give him the satisfaction of asking what was so funny.

The shackles of winter had been removed with foliage of every description sprouting throughout the campus. A gentle breeze blew as they walked toward Witherspoon Street. Crowded outside the Balt, a group of elementary school students pressed toward the store's windows. Preston understood the reason upon seeing Albert Einstein. After emigrating from Germany to Princeton in 1933, the professor became a celebrity whenever around town. Buying ice cream drew attention.

This was the first time Preston had been close to the legend. It was amazing to see him interact with the young children as the assembly consumed their frozen treats. With flowing gray hair resting on the top roll of his ever-present turtleneck sweater, Einstein demonstrated his technique for preventing melting ice cream running down the cone. Someone in the crowd asked if that was a law of physics. He laughed and said that he had been researching the topic for years and wasn't sure.

"Let's go, unless you want to stay and see an old man dribble down his chin." Johnson turned on his heels and continued walking toward Palmer Square. Shop windows announced the latest spring fashions and reminders not to forget Mothers Day.

Preston doubled-timed to catch up. "Einstein's a treasure."

"The *treasure* hasn't come up with anything new since 1912. He's a has-been." Clark stopped. "Did you recognize the men he was with? I guess you didn't."

"I have zero idea."

"Von Newmann and Danofsky, two physicists from Germany. Einstein attracts them like flies to manure. There must be a large arrow on the Atlantic Ocean pointing in the direction of the United States saying, all the unwanted and discarded are welcome. America is that a way."

Preston wanted to throw the suit at Clark who stopped at a newsstand at the corner where Nassau Street intersected Palmer Square. The square was home to twenty mom and pop stores, the post office, and the Nassau Inn that had been a town fixture since 1756. "I'll meet up with you," Clark said. Preston kept walking.

As Preston passed the inn, Clark drew even. He had a newspaper tucked under his right arm, a cigarette between his teeth, and pack of Lucky Strikes in his shirt pocket. They crossed the street. *Breslow's University Cleaners* was stenciled in gold on the storefront window. Preston tapped Clark on his chest. "Do me a favor, don't say anything."

Clark raised his arms in mock surrender, staying right outside the open door. He unfolded the newspaper. The distance from the door to the counter was no more than ten feet. Clean garments hanging on black pipe racks consumed the available floor space. Preston sidestepped a tailor altering a pair of trousers with a foot-powered sewing machine. "How's my friend Mr. Swedge?" an elderly gentleman said in a heavy German accent, his back in an eternal hunch from years at a sewing machine. An orange tape measure was draped around his neck.

"Mr. Breslow," Preston hesitated, placing the suit on the counter. "I had a little accident."

Breslow examined the gray suit. "Mustard!" Looking over his glasses resting on the tip of his nose, he shook his head in despair. "Mr. Swedge, have you ever heard of a napkin, maybe they should teach its use at the university. Tuesday, the suit will be as spot free as humanly possible."

Preston thanked Breslow and waited for a woman carrying what appeared to be her entire wardrobe to enter. Clark folded the newspaper and followed him out into the bright sunlight. "Why do you let him talk to you like that?" Clark spat loud enough for Breslow to hear. "I use a cleaner over on South Tulane."

Preston began walking back to the Balt. "What is this respect crap? The man is at least fifty years older than we are. I don't think that's the issue. My father had his clothes cleaned here, and I have told you what his feelings are."

"I'm impressed by you're sudden allegiance to your father," Clark said sarcastically as he skipped along imitating a girl of seven or eight.

"Jerk."

Clark halted as they approached the post office. "I could use something stronger than a Coke." He turned on his heels and jogged back toward Breslow's.

"Wait up," Preston called without success. Johnson disappeared at the end of the block. Hulfish Street, the south side of the square, was deserted

except for a group of women bustling from the Christian Science reading room. With Clark nowhere in sight, Preston circled to his right and stopped at an alleyway guarded by an open wrought iron gate. The cobblestone passage provided rear access to the shops on Hulfish.

Preston warily stepped through the gate. The alley was deserted except for a flock of pigeons pecking at the cobblestones a hundred yards away. Barred windows and steel doors with “NO ADMITTANCE” signs decorated the brick buildings erected in the early 1800s. Overflowing garbage cans baking in the sun produced a pungent aroma.

A door banged open where the pigeons were busy. The gray beggars quieted in anticipation of receiving an afternoon snack. Breadcrumbs showered the pavement, producing a scrum between the birds.

Preston sidestepped a pothole where the cobblestones were missing and proceeded toward the feeding pigeons. Ceramic tiles depicting an orange tiger with ten-inch black claws were cemented to the bricks above the door. As Preston pulled on the handle of the aged metal door marked by saucer size areas of rust, a push from the inside knocked him backwards. A burly fellow, wearing grease stained mechanic overalls, gave Preston a cold challenging stare. Having faced his share of bullies at Choate, he recognized this one was itching for a fight. Despite being six inches taller, Preston gave the brawler room and watched him stagger away.

The repeal of the Volstead Act in 1933 ended Prohibition and the need for the speakeasy where tradesmen and professionals rubbed shoulders. Nassau Street had its share of restaurants with liquor licenses, but for those wanting a shot of the hard stuff or a glass of suds without the glitz of starched linen tablecloths, the announcement of the downtown watering hole’s closing was met with sharp opposition. The Tiger’s Claw was the legitimate offspring.

Preston stepped into the Tiger’s Claw and waited for his eyes to acclimate to the light provided by a series of low watt wall light fixtures mounted to bare brick walls and a pool hall green glass shaded lamp suspended over the bar where Clark sat alone with the newspaper spread before him. The bartender, busy stacking a supply of glasses, never looked at the new arrival. Two gray haired men wearing suits and ties occupied one of a dozen tables nursing tumblers and cigars. The lunch crowd was long gone.

Preston weaved his way around empty tables and slid onto a stool to Clark's left. "Sometimes I wonder about you and your games," Preston said, looking at the boxing memorabilia hung around the room. Behind the bar, a signed picture of Gene Tunney was prominently displayed next to a framed front page from *The Daily News* proclaiming the end of Prohibition. "I didn't know this place existed."

"There's a lot you don't know," Clark said, hoisting a beer mug. Introduced to the Tiger's Claw by upperclassmen, he had become a frequent patron. "Have a beer, my treat."

With twenty-one being the legal drinking age in New Jersey, Preston cast a puzzled look at Clark who tilted his head in the direction of the bartender. "John, the same for my friend," he barked without concern. The current owners continued the established tradition of thumbing its nose at authority and served the university trade without asking for proof.

The bartender, compact with broad shoulders and heavily muscled forearms, pulled the tap and filled a mug without glancing at the customers who barely needed to shave. He slid the mug to Preston, and then returned to stacking glasses. "Nice of you to wait," Preston said. "We were supposed to go to the Balt."

"You hungry?" John asked without turning around. He could see the duo in the mirror hung behind the bar. "The kitchen closes soon. Good roast beef sandwiches." His accent was eastern European.

"Sounds good," Preston replied, trying to identify where John was from. "On rye with a pickle."

"You?" John asked Clark.

Clark snapped the paper to the front page. "I'm good." A smile covered his face.

John pushed the kitchen door open with his foot and yelled in the order. He returned to the glasses.

Clark flopped the *Times* on the bar. "Read the headline," he said, fumbling for a cigarette.

With his eyes as large as silver dollars, Preston read the article above the fold. "This is unbelievable," he said, taking a sip from the mug. "Nine hundred and thirty six passengers, all Jews but six on a German ship out of Hamburg, docked in Havana where the Cubans renounced the validity of their visas. The ship was back into international waters."

John finished stacking glasses, moved behind the beer taps, and proceeded to wipe the area with a dishrag.

Clark struck a match and took a long pull on the Lucky Strike then tapped the ash into a sand-filled galvanized steel bucket on the floor. "You're not grasping the significance," Clark said, shaking his head vehemently. "The St. Louis sailed close to Miami, but the Coast Guard prevented it from entering our territorial jurisdiction."

Preston put his elbows on the bar, returning to the paper. "They were denied access even though the majority has papers designating them eligible for immigration? I don't understand."

John stopped wiping the taps and stood with the dishrag squeezed in a fist.

"That's the crux of what I am saying," Clark said, pointing his cigarette at Preston. "Nobody wants them. That ship has been known in Washington for a week, and I don't see any welcome mat being put out."

Preston slapped the paper on the bar, drawing the attention of the two men at the table. "There are under-populated areas in this country where they could easily be accommodated."

"The better question is why the American Jewish community hasn't been heard from. The only vocal one I know of is a rabbi named Stephen Wise from New York. I asked Father Coughlin why Wise isn't evoking a response among his fellow Jews. Do you know the answer?" Clark asked, dropping the cigarette into the bucket.

Preston answered with a blank expression.

John threw the dishrag onto the bar. "They're afraid what happened in Germany could happen here."

Clark pounded the bar with his fist. "Right you are barkeep." He drained his mug and held it out for a refill.

John refilled Clark's mug then disappeared into the kitchen, returning with Preston's roast beef sandwich. He stood with his arms crossed on his chest. "The United States and the other democracies didn't scream too much over the *Kristalnacht* episode. The Nazis must think they can do what they wish without facing consequences," Clark said.

"You happy with the situation?" the bartender asked with bitterness.

Preston ate his sandwich, staying out of the conversation. He'd allow the thirty-something muscle rippling European to take on Clark. "What do you

mean?” Clark asked defensively.

“You think it’s funny there’s a ship filled with desperate people who could find themselves back where they began,” John said, losing control of his anger.

“John, I didn’t know you allowed Nazi lovers in here,” one of the table’s inhabitants said.

“I’m an observer of the political scene, not a Nazi lover,” Clark retorted. “Admission to the United States is contingent on the ability of the applicant to prove to consular officials that he or she will not become a drain on the American public. The Germans have limited the amount of money Jews can take out of Germany to ten *Reichsmarks*, or the equivalence of four dollars. With only four dollars in their pockets, they can’t possibly sustain themselves here, and are denied the necessary documents for immigrating.”

“Money,” John seethed. “Lives for dollars.”

“Money’s not the point,” Clark interrupted. “Hitler maintains that if America, a country that has in the past permitted the lowest kind of trash to immigrate, doesn’t want the Jews, what is Germany to do?”

The door creaked open. Hyman Breslow was in for his afternoon beer. His orange tape measure was still draped around his neck. “Mr. Swedge!” he said as he doffed his fedora to the men at the table. “Janos, the usual. My throat is parched like a desert.”

“You’re a Czech?” Clark asked John. The smile disappeared from his face.

John tapped a pilsner for Breslow. “Hyman, do you know this one?” he asked, gesturing with his thumb to Clark. “Makes excuses for the Nazis.”

“No. Only Mr. Swedge,” Breslow said, taking his beer to the end of the bar near the door. It was his turn to smile.

“I’m from Prague,” John said menacingly to Clark. Janos Lederman left Czechoslovakia at the age of eighteen, arriving in Newark in 1928 to live with a cousin. John “found” Princeton while making deliveries for the bootlegger Abner “Longie” Zwillman.

Clark casually lit a cigarette. “I didn’t...”

With one motion, John grabbed Clark by the collar and lifted the squirming freshman off his seat. “The Gestapo arrested my father, and he hasn’t been heard from since. My mother prays he’s alive. I suspect the worse.”

Clark tried to break John's grip, but the result was a tighter vice around his throat. "You're choking me!" he rasped, his eyes wide with fear.

John dragged Clark along the bar, switching hands to bypass the taps. Preston recoiled, dropping his sandwich on the floor as Breslow calmly moved away from the action.

Clark dropped to his knees, gasping for breath as John dragged him toward the door. Preston stayed frozen as the incensed bartender pulled Clark to his feet. A combination of punches landed on the side of Clark's head and stomach. John pushed the door open with his foot and propelled Clark onto the cobblestones. "The drink is on the house," John said as he pulled the door closed and returned to his position behind the bar.

Preston backed to the door, expecting the same treatment. Breslow returned to the bar and retrieved his drink. "Mr. Swedge, I'll see you on Tuesday."

Chapter 15

BROOKLYN, NY MAY 1939

IT WAS ALMOST ONE O'CLOCK in the morning when Paul unlocked the door to the apartment. He was surprised to see the kitchen light was still on and proceeded to step lightly down the hall. Hearing his mother's voice prepared him for an ensuing game of twenty questions. She was in the midst of a conversation with Jake as he appeared in the doorway.

"I was getting worried, look what time it is," Rachel said. "I couldn't sleep, then Jake came home and kept me company."

"Well Romeo, how was your date this evening with Miss Sarah Greenbaum from the Bronx?" Jake asked, nursing a cup of coffee at the table. His massive forearms and chest stretched the cotton of his T-shirt.

"To answer your question big brother, my evening with Miss Greenbaum was very nice," Paul said. "I'll take a cup of coffee if you have any left."

"Jake tells me you and Sarah are keeping steady company. Is this the truth or is he just being his usual trouble making self?" Rachel asked.

Jake reached for the percolator on the stove behind him, giving it a shake to feel if he could eke out a cup. "Paul, there should be just enough to keep a tough guy like you up all night. Tell Ma if I'm a trouble maker or the bearer of the truth."

Paul held out a mug for Jake. "He's telling the truth. I wish she didn't live way up in the Bronx." He yawned, dropping a hint that he didn't want to get into any deep discourse on his date.

His mother had other ideas. "Not to get too personal, but what did you do tonight?" she asked.

There was no easy way out without telling her to mind her own business. "I intended to get to her house by five. Unfortunately, the subway was

screwed up when I had to change at the Grand Concourse and didn't get to her place until nearly six," Paul said, sipping the coffee that had the consistency of sludge. "Her parents insisted we stay for supper. Don't worry Ma, the brisket was tasty, but not as good as yours."

Rachel blushed at the compliment. "I'm sure Mrs. Greenbaum is a good cook."

"All of a sudden, her aunt burst in with some astounding news. Her niece in Hamburg secured passage on the ship St. Louis scheduled to dock in Havana in two days."

"I didn't think it was still possible to get out of Germany. It's a miracle, nothing more." Rachel put her hands together as if she were praying. "I'm a little confused by who this girl is related to. By the way, I baked a crumbcake, do you want a piece?"

Paul shook his head. "Minnah is Sarah's cousin. They're the same age. Sarah's mother has two sisters, one lives in the Bronx, the other in Hamburg."

"You can't trust the Cubans. They're capable of pulling a fast one at the last minute," Jake said.

Rachel stood up and removed her apron. It didn't matter that she was dressed in an old pink terry cloth robe. "Jake, sometimes you make me angry. With such wonderful news, you have to act like a wet blanket and suggest that something is bound to go wrong. You never were this way. I don't know what changed you." She stared at her older son. "Now that I know my boys are home, I can go back to bed."

The boys said good night. Jake nibbled on a piece of cake. "I've dealt with some Cubans down at the pier. Those guys would take your eyeballs out and try to sell them back to you. They don't dare to pull any shit with us, because they'd end up floating back to Havana face down."

"Ma lives in her own world. Talking to her and Pop can wreck your mind, especially when the topic concerns what is happening in Europe. The Greenbaums have a bunch of relatives in Germany and some in Czechoslovakia. The talk centered on getting the rest over here."

Jake brushed crumbs off the counter. "It's not totally impossible to get someone out. The other day, I heard a ship came into port with extra cargo on board. Like everything else in this world, what is heartache to one is an

opportunity to another. If a profit can be made on some desperate Jews, why not? I'm going to bed, shut off the light little brother."

The conversation with Jake knocked the sleep out of Paul. He went to the living room and stretched out on the sofa. A sudden thump on his chest woke him with a start. He sat up to find the Sunday *New York Times* sitting on his chest with Jake holding a worried look on his face. "I know Ma doesn't want us to sleep on this sofa, but come on," Paul whined.

Jake turned the paper so it faced Paul. "Rub the sleep from your eyes and read. I'm going to put up some coffee."

The *Times* article was a rehash of the ongoing saga of the German ship, the *St. Louis*, with one bit of new news—Cuban President Federico Laredo Bru formally declared the travelers' immigration documents were invalid despite the fact that a Cuban in charge of immigration had sold them. The unfortunate buyers would again have to obtain valid visas approved by the Cuban government.

Paul walked into the kitchen. "What is going to happen to those people on board the ship?"

"I told you the Cubans can't be trusted," Jake said, sliding a coffee cup to his agitated brother. "And I'm not sure about our own government either."

Paul took a deep breath and sat at the table, watching Jake slice a bagel and painstakingly place a slab of cream cheese on it. His brother was stalling, the taught muscles in Jake's eighteen-inch neck were a dead giveaway. "Get it out before it hurts you."

Jake handed Paul the bagel and proceeded to repeat the ritual. "We're preparing for what could happen in this country," he said, knowing that if their mother found out what he was about to involve the baby of the family in, his life would be a living hell. Eventually, Paul would be placed in harm's way, but the United States government would be responsible. "We're developing our own intelligence and military units."

"Why are you telling me this now?"

Jake was under pressure to find and recruit people that could be trusted. The movement required muscle and brains. The former was easy to find, the latter more difficult. "I'm asking if you want to join."

Paul took a bite of the bagel. "A Jewish underground army."

Jake crunched his legs under the table as he took a seat. "You'll be placing yourself in danger from a number of areas: The first being our fight

with the Bund. They're desperate to find out who was responsible for hitting them. The second problem is our own government will put us in jail for the rest of our lives if we get caught."

"Why did it take you so long to ask me?" Paul asked. "Stop treating me like I'm your baby brother."

Jake returned to the counter and refreshed his coffee. "I'll remember that," he said with a wry smile. "The Greenbaums must be devastated by the Cuban double-cross. You know, it's kind of funny how one's perception can be changed by knowing someone on board."

"How so?"

Jake became animated, waving his arms. "If I read the story of the St. Louis and the poor devils on board before I heard about Sarah's cousin, I would've been sympathetic and outraged. Now, it is personal."

"You don't know the Greenbaums or Sarah's cousin. She's a name without a face."

Jake looked pensively at the headline. "How much do you like Sarah? It's hard for me to talk about this kind of stuff. Do you love this girl? Don't give me any bullshit. This is serious business."

"Sarah is different than the other girls I've dated. If missing someone is a definition of love," Paul hesitated, "then I love her. There I said it. But Jake, how do my feelings for Sarah change what's going to happen to her cousin?"

"Some people I work with," Jake said between bites of his bagel, "have contacts in Miami and Havana. I've done my share of jobs for those guys, and I can ask a favor. That's why I needed to know how you really feel about Sarah. I don't have an unlimited supply of IOUs. The situation has to be a matter of life and death, and Sarah's cousin is in it up to her neck."

"This deal is going to hinge on money, isn't it? How much and how soon?"

"How is Sarah's family fixed? This could be an expensive proposition. I have to be sure the transaction can be completed before we start. My associates don't appreciate having their chains yanked."

Paul held his hand up and stopped talking. He pointed to the sound of footsteps in the hall. "Mr. Greenbaum works at the wholesale vegetable market in the Bronx. They have a nice apartment, but money to bribe somebody, I don't think so."

“This sort of thing requires a lot, close to ten grand. That doesn’t include travel expenses,” Jake said.

The footsteps reappeared. Abe Rothstein, in rapidly failing health, shuffled back to his bedroom. “Travel expenses?” Paul asked. “I thought you could swing this thing from New York.”

Jake rose from his chair, stretched, and walked to the open window facing Flatbush Avenue. “The traffic sounds different on a Sunday. It’s still crazy even this early, but instead of delivery trucks, you have family cars. People going and doing what they can’t do during the week.”

“I don’t want to sound like a philosopher,” Jake said, turning toward Paul, “but thinking about the *St. Louis* got to me. Nicky’s uncle Tommy can make the right connections in Cuba. The money has to be taken down there personally to ease the way.”

“Are you sure Nicky’s uncle can do what you say he is capable of? I would hate to get the Greenbaums’ hopes up and then smash them to bits. That would be worse than the situation now,” Paul cautioned.

“I’m going to go over to Nicky’s to borrow the Buick and check some details. I should be back in three-quarters of an hour. In the meantime, call Sarah and tell her we’re coming up to talk things over with her parents.”

Rachel was out of bed. Having surveyed the living room, she made her way to the kitchen. Paul looked at his brother with the knowledge that he was about to face the wrath of the keeper of the sacred sofa. “Who was the smarty that slept on the sofa?” Rachel demanded, her floral housecoat flowing behind.

Jake pointed to Paul. “I won’t lie, it was your younger son. I have to meet Nicky,” He kissed his mother on the cheek then left the apartment.

“Where is Jake going so early?” Her eye caught the paper, staring incredulously at the headline. “Doesn’t anybody care?” The conversation from the previous night came back to her. “Do you have any idea what your brother is up to? That Nicky Spagnola and his Italian gangster family have changed my boy. I know he does things that are illegal. He always has extra money when everybody is watching their pennies. You going to tell your mother, Paulie?”

Paul poured Rachel a cup of coffee, topping off his own. “Do you want a bagel? Jake brought them home fresh from the oven.”

Rachel wasn't to be put off. She took a sip from the steaming cup. "Paulie, don't change the subject. You've always been a very bad liar, so don't even attempt to fool me."

"Listen Ma, Jake moves in circles which we don't have the wildest ideas about. His job has brought him into contact with people who are very powerful, who deal with people in politics and in the government."

Rachel sat shaking her head. "You're putting a shine on what he does. Those men down on the pier are gangsters. I read the papers, and I know Nicky Spagnola's uncle is a big mob boss. My son is a gangster too. They say you have to call a spade a spade. Jake, sooner or later, is going to get into trouble, big trouble."

Paul rubbed the stubble on his chin. "Jake hasn't told me what he does on his job. What I know is, he is someone who doesn't take lightly to what is happening to Jews in Europe. Nicky's uncle has the clout to get Sarah's cousin off that ship. That's the reason he went out this morning."

Rachel broke off a piece of bagel and took a bite. "I know that he's upset by what we hear from Europe, but I'm surprised he's getting involved. I go to the movies and see these pictures with George Raft and Humphrey Bogart. They talk about favors. If you ask a favor, they say you owe a favor."

Paul laughed, but had to admit to himself that his mother was correct about the favor issues. "The movies aren't real. It's not like he is asking for a favor. Believe it or not, Nicky's uncle treats Jake like a nephew. You asked why he's involved. The reason is very simple. He's doing it for me."

"Because of your girlfriend?" Rachel asked.

Paul was about to reply to his mother when Jake returned. "We've got to get moving, I'm double parked."

Jake navigated Nicky's Buick toward the Brooklyn Bridge. With the mild spring weather, the bridge walkways were crowded with pedestrians on their way to the lower east side of Manhattan. They moved quickly up First Avenue in the light Sunday morning traffic, crossing the Willis Avenue

Bridge into the Bronx. The Greenbaum apartment was two blocks from Yankee Stadium where the Rothstein's beloved Dodgers had spent many a long day. Jake would forever bear the reminder of the 1937 World Series. The despised Giants had won the National League Pennant. Jake believed in the adage that he was a fan of any team playing the Yankees and accepted tickets to the fourth game of the World Series played in the Bronx. Afterwards, a fight ensued outside of the Stadium, where Jake received the present of a two-by-four on the side of the head. Besides a concussion, he had suffered a ruptured left eardrum.

Luckily the Yankees were on the road, finding a parking space was relatively easy. Sarah was waiting outside, greeted Paul with a well-placed kiss on his cheek, and gave Jake a hug. The trio climbed the stairs to the fifth floor.

Sarah opened the green door of 5B to reveal a living room smaller than their Brooklyn bedroom. Seated on a canary yellow sofa were four adults. On the hard-wood floor, two young children played with a box of blocks. The men rose as Sarah introduced her parents Heshie and Hannah and her Aunt Rima and Uncle Louis Freidman. Jake towered over Heshie and Louis at the amusement of the kids who waved hello.

Jake felt the stares of Sarah's family, understanding their apprehension. Just days ago, they were euphoric with news of Minnah's deliverance from hell, only to be placed on an emotional roller coaster. He gazed around the room, eyeing the framed photos of family, many of which he surmised were languishing behind Nazi borders.

It was time to get to the point. "I'm sorry that you have such *tsorris*," Jake said softly. "However, as Paulie explained on the phone, there's a chance Minnah can be gotten off the *St. Louis*."

"Mr. Rothstein, how is it possible that you can make a miracle, when the papers tell a different story?" Hannah asked.

"Please call me Jake," he said with a reassuring smile. "Mrs. Greenbaum, you asked me a valid question. I'm not in the business of making miracles, but I work with people who have some influence, and it is this influence that can perform miracles."

Unconvinced, Louis said, "Jake, we appreciate your kindness, but there has to be some more to this. Why should the Cubans give a damn about our niece?"

“Mr. Freidman, as you say, they don’t give a damn about Minnah. They only give a damn about money. If the right people can be approached, they can be persuaded to change their minds and cooperate.”

“When you say money, how much money are you talking about?” Heshie asked in a concerned tone.

Jake picked at a scab on the index finger of his left hand. He was stalling, trying to find a way to tell Sarah’s family he needed ten thousand dollars. Avoiding their faces, he looked toward his brother sitting next to Sarah. Paul waited for Jake to lower the boom.

Jake couldn’t bring himself to squash the last vestige of hope that Sarah’s family clung to. “It’s going to take a thousand dollars. I know it’s a lot of money, but that is part of the miracle.”

They were expecting a sum both unattainable and unaffordable. Sighs of relief filled the air. “Jake,” Heshie said, “are you sure?”

“I’m certain,” Jake said straight faced. “Does anyone have a passport? The money needs to be taken to Havana.” He already knew the answer was going to be no. Why would a bunch like that have need for a passport? He would get away with this thousand dollar lie.

“No one in our family has a passport. Who’s going to go to Cuba, if we can’t?” Louis asked.

Paul sat in disbelief about what had just transpired. Toscanini never conducted an orchestra better than Jake was doing in that apartment. “I have a passport, so I suppose I’ll be taking the trip. I need to be able to identify her. With the type of characters in charge of the ship, one can’t be too careful. I wouldn’t want to rescue the wrong person.”

Hannah Greenbaum went to the wall of pictures, and removed a framed eight-by-ten. She removed the photo, handing it to Jake then turned to Rima. “Do you have a more recent picture? Minnah is fifteen in this one.” Rima shook her head in the negative.

“Does Minnah speak English?” Jake asked. “I really don’t understand German.”

“In one of the letters I received, her mother wrote she was studying English, but the Nazis had closed the schools to all Jewish children. I don’t know how much she understands or speaks. Why do you ask?” Rima said.

“For a couple of reasons. It would be nice if I could let her know what was happening, and what to expect. Secondly, getting through immigration

is tough enough under normal circumstances. If there are any questions concerning the validity of her papers, English would be a plus.”

Heshie became unhinged, beads of perspiration dotted his brow. “How are you going to do this? The more you talk, the more it seems impossible to get her into this country. I’m afraid this is going to end badly.”

Sarah spoke for the first time. “Papa, if Jake didn’t think he could carry out his plan, I don’t think he would have come here. We have to have faith because no one else has the means or the courage to undertake such an endeavor.”

Jake looked at his probable sister-in-law. His brother was indeed the smarter of the two Rothstein boys. While reassuring her family, she also gave Jake confidence. “I’m going to need some additional help. Mr. and Mrs. Greenbaum, I have to ask your permission to let me take Sarah with me. She will be an immense help with Minnah. Paul is also coming. What do you say?”

“This is so very sudden. You have to give me and my husband a few minutes to talk this over,” Hannah said.

“I understand completely. Paul and I are going downstairs. Decide what you think is correct,” Jake said.

They took the stairs and kept their thoughts to themselves until they arrived outside of the building. Jake straddled the railing bordering the marble steps. “Have you lost your mind?” Paul asked, pointing at his brother. “A thousand dollars! Oh, by the way, Paulie is coming with me. It’s all right to let your daughter go to Florida with two Brooklyn brothers, one of whom she’s met a total of two times! These people may be simple, but that doesn’t make them simpletons.”

Jake turned to the bright sun. “I realize I blindsided you. I arrived here with the intention of telling them the truth about the money. I sized them up real fast. There is no way in hell they could raise that amount in a year. In fact, we’ve actually got twelve hours to get it together.

“Your girlfriend is way too smart to be fooled. However, she knows Minnah’s chances of getting off the St. Louis are next to nothing without me. If I could bring her to Havana, I would, but that’s not going to happen. Somebody has to stay with her in Miami, and that job is delegated to you. If I understand correctly, the college is in a dead period before finals.”

Paul walked down to the street and looked up at the building, wondering what was taking the Greenbaums so long. "Jake, you can't take this to heart. You can't save the world."

Jake hopped off the rail as Sarah came out of the door. She bounded down the steps and wrapped her arms around both of the boys' necks. "My parents agreed to let me go. Come upstairs so we can hear the rest of your scheme, Jake."

Jake's second reception was vastly different from his first. "I want to apologize," Heshie said, leading Jake to the sofa. "We appreciate you getting involved in our trouble."

Jake checked his watch. He promised Nicky he would have the car returned by 2:00. It was already 1:15. "My sources tell me the St. Louis is going to be allowed to stay in Havana for only a day or two at the most. The situation is deteriorating rapidly. We have to get down there tomorrow."

"I'll be right back," Louis excused himself to retrieve the thousand dollars.

"For some reason, this city doesn't have any regularly scheduled commercial flights. The only planes leaving are chartered. Luckily, they use Floyd Bennett in Brooklyn. One of my associates has arranged three seats on a plane leaving tomorrow at seven in the morning. With any luck, we'll be in Havana by four. I suggest Sarah pack a bag and come to Brooklyn this afternoon. Picking her up in the morning will be very difficult," Jake said.

Sarah went to the hall closet to find clothing for the tropical weather of southern Florida. "What happens if Minnah has trouble with her entry papers in Miami?" Louis asked.

"Her papers aren't going to be a factor. My plan calls for a speedboat to ferry us back to Florida to avoid the Coast Guard."

Sarah returned with a small leather valise. She exchanged hugs and kisses with her family. Heshie and Hannah began crying. "We wish you the very best of luck," Heshie said, wiping his eyes. "Our thoughts and prayers will be with you every minute you're away. As an uncle, I want you to deliver my niece from hell, but as a father, I beg you to keep my daughter from danger."

"Sarah will give you a call when we arrive in Miami. We really have to go," Jake said, walking to the door.

Jake peeked at the lovebirds in the back seat from the Buick's rearview mirror. The strain of the morning was on their faces. Jake tuned the radio to the Dodger game to break the silence. The boys of Ebbetts Field were hosting the St. Louis Cardinals and were taking a beating. Freddie Fitzsimmons, the Dodger starting pitcher, had given up eight runs in four innings.

"Jake, please shut it off," Paul pleaded.

Sarah, a huge Yankee fan, laughed. "You should be used to it. Another season with the same results."

Jake pulled up in front of their apartment building. "I have to get over to Nicky's, give him the car, and take care of a couple of things. I'll see you later."

Nicky Spagnola was waiting on the steps of a non-descript house on 85th Street, combing his slicked back hair. His outfit of a blue-gray Italian knit shirt and white Egyptian cotton slacks cost four times what a longshoreman earned in a month. He loathed his day job and the lowbrows he was forced to deal. Unlike his *goomba* Jake, he aspired to greater things—Uncle Tommy wouldn't be around forever. He didn't look happy. "I told you I had to take my mother to her sister's. Luckily, my cousin was going, and he gave her a ride."

"Things got a little screwy, and it took more time, I'm sorry."

Nicky opened the door on the passenger side and slid in. "Forget it. What happened?"

"Paulie's girl understands the situation, unlike her family who are deceiving themselves. By the way, she and Paulie are going with me." Jake pulled away.

Nicky shook his head. "My friend, you're plain fucking nuts. With your luck, she'll come back to New York pregnant. Where are we going?"

"Floyd Bennett, I have to pick up the tickets. Did you make the call to Miami?"

"Yeah, I did what you wanted. After the airport, we have to swing by my uncle's house. *He* wants to talk."

Floyd Bennett Field, located at the extreme eastern end of Flatbush Avenue near Jamaica Bay, was the first municipal airport in New York City. However, its use remained minimal with Newark, New Jersey attracting the majority of the commercial flights to the area for its close proximity to Manhattan and the money that lived there. Working stiffs kept their feet on the ground.

Jake pulled into a deserted parking lot next to the flight office housed in a one-story concrete block building. Nicky elected to stay in the car and listen to the radio. In less than five minutes Jake returned with three tickets in hand.

“Just heard the news,” Nicky announced. “The Cubans are going to give some Jewish agency two more days to figure out what to do with that ship. Looks like you’re cutting things close.”

Jake shrugged his shoulders. “I’ll deal with it when I get down to Miami. Let’s hope Uncle Tommy isn’t ticked off at me.”

“He wants to go over how you should approach the greaseballs in Havana. We have pull down there, but those guys would turn you into shark chum and charge you for doing the conversion.”

Jake meandered to Sheepshead Bay. He never felt comfortable being summoned by Tommy “the Corkscrew” Bavosa. Sheepshead Bay wasn’t the Brooklyn he was from. It was more like Jersey with its manicured grass and white painted fences. The Buick pulled up to Tommy’s house. Two muscle bound men working in the front yard appeared to be gardeners. Beside rakes, they each had .38s. Tommy Bavosa, considered reckless in business deals, had his personal safety as his number one priority.

The bodyguards relaxed when they recognized the occupants of the Buick. “The boss is in the backyard tending to his roses,” one of the stooges said.

Bavosa motioned for the boys to take a seat around a table situated on an Italian marble patio. He received the moniker “Corkscrew” after plunging the device into the eye of a dining companion during a heated argument. Bavosa put down his shears and removed his heavy brown gloves. Though in his early sixties, his defined biceps were evident in a sweat-stained athletic shirt. A scar extended from the base of his left ear to his shoulder; a souvenir from a six-year New York State paid vacation in Sing Sing. His mane of nearly white hair contrasted sharply to his olive skin. “Where you

two schnooks been? You're late!" he fumed. "Jake, I already called Vinnie Sapienza down in Miami. He'll go with you to Havana. He knows those bastards."

Nicky looked at his uncle, miffed at the mention of Sapienza's name. "Great choice! Jake and me had to pull his ass out of the fire when you sent us down to Florida not more than a year ago."

"I care about this guy," Bavosa said, pointing to Jake. "I don't want him to end up in some sweatbox of a cell. Vinnie knows the lay of the land. I told Vinnie and I'm telling you, no gunplay. If it looks like the shit is going to hit the fan, you get on the speedboat and get the hell out of there. The broad ain't worth getting killed over."

Jake didn't need to be reminded Tommy Bavosa demanded respect. "I appreciate what you have done. I wouldn't be in a position to help this girl if it wasn't for you."

Bavosa rose from his chair and walked to the gate. He placed his hands on Jake's shoulders. "Take seriously what I said. I wouldn't have gotten involved in this bullshit if I didn't care for you. You're family. Come back safely and quickly."

Jake and Nicky walked back to the car. Nicky took the wheel. "What's wrong with you?" Jake asked. "Why do you go out of your way to antagonize him? Don't think because you're his sister's son your blood is worth more than the other guy's. It's worth nothing."

Nicky laughed. "What are you pissing about? He's my uncle. Don't believe him when he says that you're like a nephew to him. You're still the biggest Goddamn Jew he ever saw and don't forget it. Mark my words, someday he is going to call in the IOU that you signed for him by doing you this favor."

Jake didn't answer, he knew Nicky was correct.

In silence, they made the trip from Sheepshead Bay to Flatbush Avenue in record time. "I'll be by tomorrow morning at six-fifteen to get you to the airport," Nicky said.

Laughter seeped under the door of the Rothstein apartment. Jake found his parents doting on their visitor in the kitchen. Rachel was at the stove. "We've had the most enjoyable afternoon. Paulie filled us in on the plans for the trip."

Paul motioned Jake to follow him to the living room. “I don’t mind telling you I’m having major league doubts. You’re going to place yourself into a great deal of danger for someone you don’t even know.”

Jake wrapped an arm around Paul’s neck. “The reason we have to go to Cuba is because people haven’t put their noses into other people’s businesses. If the world gave a damn, that girl wouldn’t be stuck on some piece of shit boat with a bunch of poor slobs and no hope. I’ve been involved in crazier things, and this won’t be the last. We better move one of the mattresses from our room so Sarah can stay in it. One of us will sleep on the floor and the other will sleep on Ma’s wonderful couch. I doubt she’ll have any objections.”



Jake reached over to the clock on the floor beside his head. It was a small miracle that he’d been able to get a few hours of sleep. Paul was still dead to the world. Jake picked up one of Paul’s dirty socks, rolled it into a ball, and threw a perfect strike hitting Paul squarely in his gasping mouth. “Five o’clock my boy. We only have one bathroom, and Sarah will need more time than both of us combined. You get washed up first, and I’ll get the coffee going.”

As promised, Rachel was up early. She made her way to the kitchen and kissed Jake good morning. “Ma. You look like hell. Did Pop have another one of his spells?”

She nodded. “Some nights are worse than others.”

“When I get back from Florida, we’re going to have to talk about what we’re going to do about Pop. You can’t go on like this. Do me a favor, go in and wake up Sarah.”

Rachel returned to the kitchen to find Chef Jacob at work. Eggs were frying and he already made a stack of toast. “Maybe a few sandwiches for the trip?” she asked.

“I hadn’t thought of that. Paulie, with his appetite, will probably eat the seats after five hours in the air.”

Sarah came into the kitchen and pulled up a chair. She turned down Jake's offer of a plate of eggs. "I don't normally eat at such an early hour," she nervously explained.

Jake recognized the symptoms. "Last night, I didn't ask if you've ever been on a plane." She shook her head no. "Paul's in the same situation, but he's following my suggestion to get something into his stomach. Flying is no big deal. You're going to love it." He handed her a piece of toast.

Sarah forced half a slice and a sip of water. A horn blew. Jake pushed the curtains aside, seeing Nicky's Buick. "Paulie, grab the bags." He turned to his mother. "If you get into a bind with Pop, call Nicky. I'll fill him in on what's going on."

Nicky rested against the fender, calmly manicuring his fingernails. The trunk was open. "Vinnie got a couple of Cubans to fuck things up on the dock. It should buy an extra twelve hours."

"My father is giving my mother fits and I told her to call you if she gets into a pickle. The only option is to put him in Kings County Hospital. I don't think we will be able to keep him home much longer."

"Just get down to Havana, do your thing, and get home. Don't worry about Abe. If necessary, I'll take him over to Pleasant View, a rest home owned by Tommy."

The trip to the airport was rapid. A silver DC-3 capable of seating 21 passengers, three flight crewmembers, and two cabin stewards sat one hundred yards from the gate. Jake became antsy. They were behind schedule and every minute counted for his four o'clock meeting in Havana.

Finally, at 7:30, an announcement was made to begin boarding. Jake led the way turning to see that Sarah was lagging behind. Allowing Paul to proceed ahead, he waited for the girl who talked a good game but her body language showed her true feelings. "Come on, it's like going to Coney Island, just a different kind of ride," he said, trying to build up her confidence.

"That's the problem. I can't stand those Coney Island rides. The roller coaster makes me sick. I get ill just thinking about going on the plane."

She stood frozen at the bottom of the roll-a-way steps. Not hesitating, Jake lifted Sarah over his shoulder, fighting to control the kicking one hundred fifteen pounds. The DC-3 was configured with two seats on either

side of an aisle. Jake deposited her next to Paul in the forward section. For Jake, the trip was going to be one for the books. He sat across the aisle.

Sarah looked out the window as the plane accelerated down the runway. The sight of the city seemed to ease her anxiety as the plane banked over the Statue of Liberty and began climbing. Paul propped a pillow under Sarah's head and after a few minutes she fell asleep. "If she gets up, try to give her some of this," Jake said, handing Paul a hip flask.

The flight plan consisted of three segments: Washington, D.C.; Atlanta; and Miami. With the DC-3 cruising at 170 mph, flying time to Washington D.C. was 1 hour and 15 minutes. The descent into Washington caused Sarah to complain about her ears. Jake passed her some chewing gum and told her to make believe she was a Golden Guernsey. They had twenty minutes to stretch their legs in the terminal.

Jake placed a collect call to Vinnie in Miami who was surprised to hear Jake's voice. "*Goomba*, where are you? It ain't possible that you're here already." Vinnie had a way with words.

"I just landed in D.C. Anything change?"

"The people on the ship are beginning to go crazy. This morning, one of my people in Havana told me a guy slit his wrists and jumped overboard. They fished him out of the harbor and patched him up in the local hospital. I guess the guy would rather die in Cuba than be sent back to Germany. The Cubans are getting real itchy. They don't want any more Jews getting off. Jake, I don't know how much longer we can stall them."

"I'll call from Atlanta. Make sure that the boat is ready to go as soon as I arrive." Jake hung up. He did what he normally wouldn't have done, bum a cigarette from a sailor waiting to use the phone. For whatever reason, the smoke helped settle his nerves. Jake picked up the Sunday edition of *The Washington Post* from a newsstand.

The lead article was President Roosevelt's message to the National Meeting of Moral Rearmament. Roosevelt said, "The underlying strength of the world must consist in the moral fiber of her citizens." Nowhere was there a mention of any arrangements being considered for passengers of the *St. Louis* to enter the United States. A State Department spokesman insisted that immigration quotas were to be upheld.

The article exposed an ugly blood money scheme: the president of Cuba demanded \$500 per passenger to allow disembarkation. New York attorney

Lawrence Berenson, representing the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, pleaded for time to raise the required half million dollars.

Jake tossed the paper into a trashcan. Paul and Sarah had already reboarded the plane and didn't need additional bad news. He climbed the steps, paused to look at the outline of the Capitol building, and questioned how the members of the august body could disregard the plight of the passengers on the *St. Louis*.

The white sand of Miami's famed beaches came into view as the plane followed the coastline. Finally, they were on the ground. A pudgy, balding, five-foot-five gnome rested against a chain-link fence near the terminal entrance. "That can't be the famous Vinnie," Sarah said incredulously. "He's the most important guy down here?"

Jake didn't laugh at her remarks. Vinnie was more important than she would ever know. Vinnie Sapienza, cousin to the boss, looked like an accountant. However, the only accounts that he kept were how many heads he smashed.

"It's been a long time no see," Vinnie said, placing Jake in a bear hug. "Must be your brother and the cousin of the dame who's causing all this business."

"The party responsible for this mess is in Berlin," Jake corrected. "Sarah's cousin is caught in a business deal."

Paul picked their bags from the luggage cart. Vinnie led the way to his car left in a no-parking zone and opened the trunk of the black Cadillac. "I got my place fixed up. You two should be real comfortable," Vinnie said in a distinctive Brooklyn accent despite living in Florida for almost twenty years.

Vinnie gunned the big engine and peeled away from the airport. The five mile trip brought the sights of majestic estates built prior to the stock market crash of 1929. Many were abandoned and had fallen into disrepair. Those with cash were able to purchase properties at bargain prices. Vinnie had the resources and a knack for buying low and selling high as the real

estate market rebounded. "I just had a pool put in," he said as he drove through a twelve foot high security gate that led to a circular drive way. It appeared nothing had been withheld when Vinnie constructed the house.

Vinnie's household help was waiting to receive his guests. "We don't have time for any mushy goodbyes. Jake, get your ass back in the car, we have a half an hour drive to the plane."

Jake incredulously looked at his host. "What are you talking about? You were supposed to get us a speedboat."

"*Get in the car*, and I'll fill you in," Vinnie ordered.

Jake leaned out of the window. "Paulie, call home and take care of Sarah."

"Since when have you become a mother hen? If those two had any brains, they would use the time to study anatomy." Vinnie wiped the sweat off his face with a handkerchief retrieved from a back pocket. "I've been down here a long time, you'd think I'd be used to the stinking humidity."

"Never mind the weather report. When did the plans change? You could have told me before we were ready to go," Jake protested.

"I didn't see the point in scaring the shit out of the kids. The fucking Cubans are turning the screws. We don't have the time to take a boat. If we get the broad off the ship, I have a feeling we're going to need to get away from the island in a hurry."

"Where's the plane?" Jake asked. "There isn't a private airstrip around."

A breeze whipped into the speeding car evaporating sweat from their shirts. "You gone mush in the brain or something? The Feds are always watching us, just waiting to make a bust. Hoover's morons couldn't find the planes I use to bring in goods if they stood next to them. We'll be at the strip in a few minutes."

Jake didn't have to ask what goods meant. Dope was a new addition to Vinnie's menu of prostitution, loan sharking, and gambling.

Vinnie pulled off the highway onto a narrow unpaved road. Between clouds of dust, Jake could see they were headed toward a dilapidated house that was straight out of the newly released movie *Gone With The Wind*. Vinnie slowed the Cadillac, inching across a wooden bridge spanning a creek almost dry from the sweltering sun. An alligator rested in the shade of a Palmetto tree. Vinnie drove behind a ramshackle barn onto a perfectly level grass field and stopped at a hay pile. Jake didn't see a plane anywhere.

“Come on and give me a hand clearing this stuff out of the way.” Vinnie said. The hay was glued onto plywood, which they quickly removed revealing a blue Cessna. The usual identifying markings were missing from the fuselage.

Jake was no math whiz—there were only four seats. If they had to fly Minnah out of Havana, they would require a fifth seat. “Where’s the pilot, if I’m not too pushy,” he said, wiping his brow. The sun was like fire.

“I’ll give you three guesses who the pilot is, and the first twenty don’t count.”

Jake suddenly had a gnawing knot in his stomach. The ex-Brooklynite was the person he was about to trust his life to. “How long have you had a pilot’s license?”

“Who said I have a license. Relax, I’ve been flying for almost eighteen years. I’ll start the engine and taxi away from this pile of crap. You drive the car into its place and replace the hay,” Vinnie said, climbing into the pilot’s seat. “I have to go over the plane before we get going. I may look like a schlep, but I want to get back here in one piece like you.”

Jake climbed in and buckled up. Vinnie finished checking the gauges and released the brake. He increased the throttle. The plane turned into the sultry breeze. Moving along the grass at 50 mph, Vinnie pulled back on the stick and they were airborne, beginning a slow bank toward the southwest.

Under other circumstances, it would have been a beautiful day for sightseeing. Jake tried to relax. “Isn’t it customary for a plane to have ID numbers, like plates on a car?”

Vinnie laughed. “The Cubans don’t give two shits about who or what flies onto the island. The good old Yankee dollar is all the ID you need. I fly down almost twice a week. A little business, a little pleasure. We’re going to land at the main airport where my man Cesar will be waiting. He’ll take us to President Laredo Bru. I assume General Flogenico Batista will also be present. If I had to pick the guy to take out Bru, Batista would be the one. He’ll be the power broker some day.”

Jake, surprised by the turbulence on a clear day, became sick to his stomach. “How much longer? I’ve been flying too many hours, it’s starting to get to me.”

“If you have to puke, get it into the bag,” Vinnie said, handing Jake an air-sickness bag. “To answer your question, we’ll be on the ground in about

five minutes. Look to your right, that's Cuba."

Vinnie was on the radio communicating with the control tower. Jake didn't understand a word of Spanish. Vinnie cut back the throttle, proceeded to make a slow bank to the left, and then squared to the runway. He cut the throttle completely, gliding the Cessna onto the runway with a gentle thud. Vinnie taxied to an area of the field separated from the main terminal by a row of ramshackle huts.

Two men were waiting on the tarmac, one in a tan suit, the other wearing grease-stained overalls. Jake assumed the suit was Cesar. As soon as Vinnie killed the engine, the wheels were choked, and the overalls walked quickly away.

The tan suit advanced toward the Cessna. Vinnie didn't introduce Jake. "You got everything set like we discussed this morning?"

"Señor Vinnie, please be assured we are expected at Batista's office by 4:00," Cesar responded in a subservient manner.

A Chevrolet sedan waited behind the building. The salty sea air wasn't kind to metal; the car had more rust on it than a fourteen day old Brillo pad. Vinnie scowled, "What do you mean we're going to Batista? You told me that we were set for Bru. What's going on?"

Cesar knew he was treading on very thin tropical ice. "Batista is the guy running the show with this ship. Bru, I don't know what he's up to. You can be sure they will share any money extorted from your associate. There was nothing I could do."

Vinnie put his arm on Cesar's shoulder and gave him a pat. "Take it easy. I know how these bastards work."

Cesar took the wheel advising his boss to use the right rear door, as the passenger door up front and the rear left couldn't be opened. Jake hadn't uttered a word since landing. He was out of his element and knew it. Vinnie was running the show. "You couldn't find a bigger piece of shit on the island if you tried," Vinnie fumed. "I'm embarrassed to be seen in this, no less go to the presidential building."

Cesar maneuvered out of the airport. The road to Havana was lined with thick tropical vegetation. Palm trees gently swayed in the sea breeze. Jake thought he would pass out from the heat. Cesar opened a cooler filled with ice and bottles of Coca-Cola. He handed two bottles to his passengers. "Thanks for saving my life," Jake said.

"Why are you thanking him? I pay him to take care of the details," Vinnie pointed out. "Down here, a cold drink is one of the details. You're my man, ain't that right Cesar?" Cesar nodded his head in agreement.

Havana was a prime tourist attraction with beautiful beaches and bountiful nightlife. Cesar had the map of the city in his head, changing directions constantly to avoid traffic jams that seemingly were on every street. He pulled up in front of the central government building. The structure was a mini replica of the Capitol in Washington, D.C.

"Wait for us to come out. If we can make a deal, we'll be going to the ship in Batista's car. Follow us. We'll need to get away from the ship as fast as we can," Vinnie said.

Vinnie spoke Spanish to a sentry who checked a clipboard. "This shithead is going to make us wait. He wants us to get good and hot, then put the muscle to us. He speaks English very well, but may use Spanish to intimidate you. He gets a kick out of busting balls, let me deal with him. They never get it through their ears that haggling is a New York tradition and that we never lose."

Vinnie took out a pack of Pall Malls offering one to Jake. "You act like the weight of the world is on your shoulders. If this piece of shit senses you're in a desperate way, he's going to squeeze you dry." Vinnie struck a match. "We'll use your moniker Ted Steele, sounds better than Jacob Rothstein. Here comes the messenger boy."

This time the guard spoke English telling them to follow him to the general's office. The building was deceiving; one expected an immense structure from its outside appearance. However, the inside was a maze of narrow corridors. For the seat of power, it was deathly quiet. Their footsteps echoed off the tiled floor. A sergeant stood guard at Batista's office. Seated behind an immense hand carved mahogany desk sat the general, resplendent in a white uniform with gold brocade and a wall of medals adorning his chest. Batista stood, motioning them to two chairs in front of the desk.

"General, it is indeed a pleasure to see you again. On behalf of my uncle, I want to thank you for giving us your valuable time. I know that my associate Mr. Steele shares my sentiments," Vinnie said.

"I'm fully aware of the purpose of your visit," Batista said in impeccable English. "Time is of the essence since the *St. Louis* has been ordered out of port by five o'clock. It is now nearly four, so let's get down to business."

Vinnie started to speak, but was waved off by Batista. “The girl on the ship is a concern of Mr. Steele am I not right? How much are you prepared to donate to the Cuban treasury?”

Jake looked over to Vinnie, who turned to the window. “*The New York Times* said your government was demanding five hundred per head. As a show of appreciation, I am prepared to donate one thousand.”

Batista laughed as he swiveled in his high-backed chair. “I think four thousand would be greatly appreciated for this delicate situation.”

“General, the best that I can do is three thousand.” Jake paused. “My people in New York would also appreciate your help.”

Batista’s mulled over the offer. It was six times what a Jew was worth. Besides, he really couldn’t afford to get the North Americans angry. “My government will graciously accept your donation.” He put on his army dress hat. “We go over to the harbor.”

Jake and Vinnie followed a few feet behind. They exited the building through a side door where a new Cadillac was waiting. The driver stood at attention and opened the opened right rear door for Batista.

The Cadillac moved away from the presidential building and proceeded to pick up speed. Vinnie turned around to look out the rear window to see if Cesar was in step. Batista laughed at the sight of the pile of rust on wheels. “Do you fellows plan to spend any time with us after we pick up our guest at the ship? It would be a pity if you didn’t take in the wonderful evening delights.”

“We would like it very much, but I have pressing business back in Miami. You understand how difficult it is to leave things to underlings,” Vinnie said.

Batista grunted in agreement. The Cadillac approached the waterfront where troops outnumbered the passengers on the ship. The scene was surreal. Jake tried to imagine what it was like at night with searchlights bathing the water, daring the desperate to swim to freedom. Added to the mix were relatives of the passengers and representatives from various Jewish agencies who had traveled from the United States to escort the immigrants to freedom. The discourse between those on the ship and the pier produced a buzz from a giant beehive.

The attention of the crowd was drawn toward the approaching Cadillac, causing the troops to spring into action. The Cuban militia not needing an

excuse to pummel anyone near the ship quickly cleared a path.

A lieutenant snapped to attention as the car came to a stop. He opened the rear door allowing Batista to make a grand entrance onto the dock. Jake and Vinnie watched the general address his troops. "This is some kind of zoo our friend has made out of this. He craves the attention. Nobody ever heard of him outside the island. His appearance makes a lot of people shit their pants on board this ship, keeping them dancing like a puppeteer. Says one minute he is going to kick them out of the country, then lets them stay," Vinnie said.

"They call it psychological warfare," Jake replied. "Take a look at the faces along the rails. They're at their wits end. Here he comes."

Batista sauntered back toward the Cadillac. "Mr. Steele, let's go onto the ship and see Captain Schroeder. Vincent, you are welcome to accompany us if you wish. I forget what this girl's name is."

"Minnah Goldstein, General," Jake said.

Vinnie didn't move. Jake followed Batista up the gangway to the main deck, as a squad of troops kept the passengers at bay. Captain Joachim Schroeder, seeing the Cadillac on the pier, had made his way to the deck. Schroeder, wearing his expertly tailored and pressed white dress uniform, cast an image of professionalism. "To what do I owe this visit, General? I expected to see you, but not this *soon*."

"My dear Captain, let me introduce you to Señor Steele of New York," Batista said in an uncommonly relaxed way. "He's here to retrieve a girl named Minnah Goldstein. Would you be so kind to locate her?"

Schroeder looked at Jake for a moment then excused himself. Returning to the bridge, he could be seen talking to a sailor. Jake became uncomfortable as passengers pointed in his direction.

Schroeder returned. "I have sent for the girl. Please be patient, this is a large vessel. My passengers have been cooped up on board for almost two weeks. It's inhuman to continue keeping them prisoner. I implore you to let them off the ship for even a short walk."

Batista lost his charm. "It is beyond my control to allow your passengers off the ship. The time is rapidly approaching where a decision is going to be made by the government of Cuba if you will be allowed to continue mooring in our waters."

Jake was glad he wasn't in Schroeder's shoes when it became clear to the inmates that the ship was going back out to sea. Two sailors led a girl carrying a suitcase to the main deck. Jake reached into his pocket and produced the photo given him by the Greenbaums. She definitely was the girl in the picture.

Minnah needed to be supported. Without explanation, she had been told to gather her belongings and follow. She found herself barely able to stand before Schroeder and the Cuban who she recognized as the man who held the fate of the passengers in his hands.

Schroeder placed his hands on Minnah's shoulders and explained to her in German that she was about to be set free. Why he didn't know, but the man with Batista was from New York, and she was to go with Herr Steele. Schroeder kissed her on the cheek and turned her over to Jake. "Mr. Steele, I present to you Miss Goldstein. She's a fine young woman, please take care of her. General, I suppose we have concluded our business. I'll await your further instructions." He saluted and turned away.

Jake picked up Minnah's suitcase, placed a hand under her elbow, and helped her down the gangway. The crowd on the pier surged forward, demanding an explanation for Minnah's removal from the ship. A series of machine gun bursts over their heads stopped a riot in the making. Batista wasn't smiling as he climbed into the front seat allowing his visitors to take the large rear seat. Salutes were given, which Batista didn't bother to return. Minnah, still shaking, began sobbing as the car drove away.

Cesar was waiting at the end of the dock. Batista instructed his driver to pull over. "Gentlemen, your limousine awaits. We have completed our business, and I must say, in a most efficient manner. In the future, I hope we may do further transactions. Give my regards to your associates in the States."

The threesome got out of the car and walked toward Cesar's rusting heap. Batista sat in his car shaking his head. He couldn't understand what the fuss was over a ship of Jews. He should've sold the lot, ignoring the outside pressure being placed on his government from both the United States and Germany.

Vinnie took his place up front. "Get us to the airport as fast as this rolling shitpile can go. I don't like the look on Batista's face."

Minnah, oblivious to what was happening, looked out the window. Jake laughed to himself about Sarah saying the girl had studied English. She didn't understand a word.

As they approached the airport, Minnah tried to ask if they were going on a plane. When words failed Jake, gestures took their place. He formed a plane with his hand, causing her eyes to widen. He couldn't tell if she was excited or scared stiff.

Cesar followed his boss' orders with reckless abandon, turning into a narrow driveway behind the huts on two wheels. Jake braced Minnah for a crash that would end with the jalopy on its side. With metal crunching in his brakes, Cesar ended the joyride forty feet from the Cessna.

Vinnie had his door open before the Chevy came to a stop. He wasn't joking when he said he wanted off the island as soon as possible. "Torres!" he shouted for the mechanic who wasn't in his shed. "Where in the hell is that son of a bitch. I told him to be waiting for us, not to move from here. These greaseballs are all alike, lazy and irresponsible. If I get my hands on him... Cesar, unchock the wheels while I get the plane ready. Jake, get the girl inside and buckled up."

Jake put his shoulder against the car door to get it opened. As he reached for the suitcase, Minnah jerked it away. "It's going to be okay, we have to go," Jake said, trying to coax from the car.

"*Nein!*" she shouted back.

Vinnie finished his pre-flight procedures. He opened the window in the cockpit and screamed across the tarmac over the noise of the engine, "Get her out of the car now! Cesar, give him a hand. Pull her out by the hair if you have to."

Cesar ran over. Jake didn't want to forcibly remove the girl who had been manhandled since leaving Germany. "Minnah, let's go!" She sunk further into the seat. Jake grabbed her by the arms, dragging her kicking and screaming from the Chevy. Minnah found herself hoisted over Jake's shoulder.

Cesar opened the passenger door of the plane. Vinnie reached out for the girl. Empathy didn't exist in Vinnie's vocabulary. He took hold of Minnah and threw her into the rear of the plane. "God damn it Jake! Whack her if you have to. Make sure she is tied in. Cesar, button things up around here, and I'll be in touch in a couple of days. *Adios.*"

Jake buckled himself in, as Vinnie revved the engine. The Cessna sped through the taxiway, following the painted yellow arrows to the main runway. "What is your rush? You've been like a mad man since we left the dock," Jake yelled over the engine noise.

Vinnie monitored the gauges on the instrument panel as he maneuvered the plane to the flight line. "Stop acting like a rabbi. While you were on the ship, I talked to the lieutenant. I've dealt with him in some deals. He purposely didn't acknowledge me in front of his boss. Gomez told me that Batista might try to double-cross us, maybe even shoot us down. He doesn't want it known that he let the girl off the boat. He's crazy enough to do it. He would say that we left in one piece, sometimes things happen over the ocean." Vinnie pushed the throttle to maximum, not waiting for clearance to take off. "Reach under the seat and remove the package."

Jake pulled off the brown wrapping paper to reveal a Thompson submachine gun. Minnah took one look at the weapon, and began to wail like an air raid siren. "*Nein! Nein!*" Jake said. Minnah took the hint, sat still and whimpered. "What am I supposed to do with this?" he asked, pointing the weapon toward the window.

"You're going to shoot anything or anyone who tries to stop us. Make believe that this is a stagecoach in the old West. Hold on!" The Cessna quickly picked up speed.

Just as the Cessna began to liftoff the runway, a black Ford raced toward them. "Get ready!" Vinnie yelled. "Give them a reason to turn away. This is Batista's way of saying thank you."

Jake stuck the barrel of the Thompson out through a firing port in the window. He waited for the target to get into range. The Ford was close enough that Jake could make out the faces of the four occupants. Two rifles popped out of the Ford. Jake could see them fire, but like most things on the island, their aim was off. He fired three quick bursts, shattering the windshield of the Ford. The car veered crazily to the right, running off of the tarmac into the muddy grass.

After what seemed like eternity, they were airborne. The run of four-hundred feet could have been a hundred miles. Vinnie had the plane in a power left bank maneuver. Minnah screamed as air pressure built in their ears.

Jake looked around the perimeter of the plane, keeping his eyes alert for trouble. "I don't think Batista is going to be happy about me taking out his men. I'm pretty sure I hit the two up front."

Vinnie continued looking fore and aft. "Keep your eyes open. We won't be able to relax for another couple of minutes. Batista could've sent a plane up when he found out we got off the ground. I'm not afraid of that greaseball. I'll be back down here in a couple of days. He understands business like we do."

Jake checked his watch—5:30. They wouldn't be in Florida until almost 7:00. He eased back into his seat and closed his eyes. The roar of the engine was like a lullaby.

Jake woke with a startling punch to his left arm. "Time to wake up Rip Van Winkle. Thank God she also fell asleep," Vinnie said, thumbing to the rear. "We're approaching the Florida coast. Throw the Tommy gun into the ocean. If the Feds are waiting for us, I don't want to be caught with the gun." He adjusted the fuel mixture. "Do you have a plan for getting her back to New York?"

Jake opened the door a crack, slipping the weapon out. "First of all, I think we're going to have to let Minnah rest for a day or so. The best thing I can come up with is to put her on the train. Flying back is going to be too risky. They have too many immigration guys at the airport.

The light quickly faded. "How are we going to land in the dark?" Jake nervously asked.

"No problem tough guy." Vinnie began a slow turn to the east, while losing altitude. The Cessna was under 1,200 feet. The large Florida swamp pines seemed to reach out for the bottom of the plane. Suddenly a lit runway appeared. Vinnie cut the throttle—600 feet, with just a few seconds remaining in the flight. Jake saw the runway lined by cars with their headlamps on. With the slightest bump, they were on the ground. The Cessna rolled to a stop next to the movable barn.

Jake gently touched Minnah on her knee. She slowly opened her eyes. Realizing the plane had landed, Minnah unlatched her seatbelt. Jake picked up her suitcase and helped her out of the plane. Vinnie's crew quickly surrounded the plane with the plywood camouflage as they climbed into the Cadillac. The plane was hidden before they were out of sight.

“I’m impressed with your flying. If it weren’t for you, we would never been able to get her out. I won’t forget it.”

Vinnie motioned Jake to stop. “I do what my uncle tells me.” He turned into his driveway, blowing the horn as he pulled in front of the house.

The double entrance doors flew open with Sarah and Paul bounding down the steps. Unlike Havana, Jake didn’t have to pull Minnah from the car. The two girls ran to each other, tears streaming down their cheeks.

Chapter 16

PRINCETON, NJ MAY 1939

PRESTON HANDED IN HIS *CALCULUS II* final exam. He was the last one finished out of fifty-five. The term was now officially over, but for a last hurdle—checking out of Albert Hall.

“Mr. Swedge, I trust the exam was fair,” Professor Hans Schmidt said in a tone that translated to I don’t want to hear the opposite. Schmidt, by twenty-five, had published ground breaking work. His math acuity equaled his political activism. Schmidt was a frequent participant in the informal debates that broke out in the campus coffeehouses where he met and befriended Clark Johnson.

Carrying an A average into the lecture that morning, Preston didn’t recognize half of the problems. After three hours, he was worn out. “Extremely so.”

“Have you decided to accompany Clark?” Schmidt asked, placing Preston’s exam booklet on the collected pile. “You’ll be missing one heck of time.”

“I’m not so sure I want to go, considering what I read in the papers.”

Schmidt looked at Preston with a bemused expression. “Open your mind to change. What is happening in the new Germany is the wave of the future. If the climate was so threatening, do you think the International Congress of Mathematics annual meeting would be held in Berlin? Clark and I have made plans to meet. I have family across Germany who are more than thrilled to put us up.”



“Did you see the look on Price’s face when I handed him the coffee pot?” Clark said, slapping Brent Newman on the back, unable to contain himself.

“Get in the car,” Preston yelled through the window of the big touring Packard. Walters, the Swedge chauffer, drummed the steering wheel with his thumbs. They had been waiting fifteen minutes while Clark held court outside Albert Hall.

Brent Newman shook hands with the man voted by the dorm denizens most likely to be found stuffed into a discarded oil drum. “The offer still stands. Come to Charleston and I’ll show you *real* Southern hospitality.”

“He can walk to the train. *Let’s go*,” Preston ordered.

Walters released the clutch and eased away from the curb. “Wait!” Clark screamed, running down the walk, hurdling over suitcases and trunks forming an obstacle course to the street. Walters screeched the brakes. “Can I help it if I’m wanted?”

“Like Dillinger,” Preston scoffed.

Clark slid onto the plush rear seat and rested his feet on Preston’s books. His things were picked up by a freight forwarder that morning for shipment to Michigan. “Try it again, Mr. Walters,” Preston said.

The Packard pulled away, the Princeton Gate loomed ahead. With traffic sparse on Nassau Street, transversing town was easy. Walters headed north to New York.

“We did it.” Clark pulled a silver hip flask from his pocket and unscrewed the top. “We made it through year one.” He took a long pull of the Wild Turkey and offered Preston a drink.

“You *had* to give Price the coffee pot,” Preston said with disgust, shoving Clark’s hand away, “and rub his nose in it after I did everything but kiss his ass to get us checked out.”

Clark took another drink. “Everyone thought it was a riot.”

“One day you’re going to push somebody too far.” Preston closed his eyes.

Pulling all-night study jams resulted in both occupants quickly falling asleep. Midway through the Holland Tunnel, Clark woke with the smell of oil and exhaust in his nose. “Do me a favor Mr. Johnson, wake Mr. Swedge,” Walters said, watching Clark in the rear view mirror.

Clark elbowed Preston, who sat up and rubbed the sleep from of his eyes. Walters maneuvered across Houston Street, stopping at a red light on the Bowery. The everlasting effects of the Depression were evident—the homeless population hadn’t diminished after nine years. With the warm summer-like weather, the makeshift tent city was overflowing. There was no hope in sight for the apple and pencil sellers.

“Things look the same as they did a year ago,” Clark said. “Roosevelt’s programs haven’t touched this bunch.” He rolled the window up as panhandlers approached the car. “Detroit is in the same sad shape. This isn’t how it is in Germany. There, the Depression is a memory.”

“You forgot to mention Austria and those damn annoying Czechs. Absorbing the two countries into the Reich did wonders for their economies. The Czechs will be eternally grateful,” Preston quipped.

Walters took a left on First Avenue. Within minutes, the Depression seemed years in the past. Midtown was a boom in progress; the sidewalks were jammed with shoppers toting their purchases. Traffic on 42nd Street near Grand Central Station was the heaviest they encountered. Walters eased the Packard to the curb and removed Clark’s luggage from the trunk.

“Well partner, I appreciate the lift. I’ll call next week to finalize our arrangements. Remember what I said about handling your old man,” Clark said. “Walters, I appreciate the lift.”

“I do as ordered, Mr. Johnson,” Walters replied curtly, trying to hide his disdain.

The Packard moved away from the station. Walters, employed by the Swedge family since Preston was a year old, was more than a driver to the young Swedge, he was a confidant. Stolen away from his English employer by Herbert on a trip to London, the British ex-patriate brought to New York refined manners and an adherence to protocol. Alone with Preston, the rules were relaxed.

“Robert, I want to ask your opinion. Clark has extended an invitation to join his family on a trip to Germany. I’m wondering how father is going to react?”

“May I speak freely?” Walters asked.

“Of course. We never pull punches with each other.”

“Clark Johnson is a fool. Hitler ended unemployment by producing military hardware on an unprecedented scale and slapping every schnook

who didn't have a job into the army. Sooner or later, the Nazis are going to run out of money and war will be the only way to sustain their economy," Walters vented. "Why do you want to go?"

"The papers are filled with such conflicting opinions concerning Hitler. I want to see things for myself. Clark has made numerous trips to Germany; he can take me around."

"The young man is woefully misguided. If you were my son..."

"I asked about my father."

"He was talking about you working at the firm. He feels it's time you began your apprenticeship." Walters didn't want to get into the middle of a Swedge family fight. He witnessed too many over the years not to forget to mind his own business. "I would broach the subject very carefully."

Walters stopped in front of 2365 Park Avenue. Albert greeted Preston with a good-natured tap on the arm. "Mr. Swedge, asked me to send you up as soon as you arrived."

For a change, the elevator was unoccupied in the lobby. Preston rode to the tenth floor, fished his key chain from his pocket, and unlocked the door. Sunlight streaming through the windows overlooking Park Avenue brightened an otherwise dark decor. Wednesday was the maid's day off. The only sound in the 4,000 square foot apartment was the violin concerto playing on a 78 rpm recording in Herbert's study.

"You're late. Sit down," Herbert, his speech slightly slurred, commanded from his favorite high wing backed leather chair. A tumbler of scotch was at arms length on the edge of his desk beside a half smoked cigar smoldering in a massive crystal ashtray. The day's issue of *The Wall Street Journal* lay at his feet.

"It's five o'clock. Princeton isn't around the corner," Preston countered, sitting on an adjoining leather sofa. His father having an afternoon bender was never a good sign. "Where's mother?"

"*Spending* my money," Herbert said, sipping from his glass.

Spending money and flitting from one women's club to another filled Bernice's day. Preston was certain his mother wasn't the reason for his father's melancholy. "Tough day?"

"*Everyday* is tough," Herbert said with a wave of his hand. "When I was your age..."

Preston prepared himself for a trip down memory lane. It was going to be a long afternoon. "I know... you declined a chauffeured ride to grammar school, choosing to walk the three blocks."

Herbert puffed on the stogie and examined its glowing tip. "Summers are for kids and you're not a kid anymore."

The time was right to tell his father what was on his mind. "About this summer," Preston hesitated. Clark's admonishment to employ some testicular fortitude and standup to the old man echoed in his ears. "Clark has invited me to accompany him and his father to Germany. They have a spare ticket. Passage on the *Munich Star* will be covered." He braced for the patented Herbert Swedge explosion.

Herbert put down his glass and peered over his reading glasses. "When?" "Two weeks from today." Preston looked for the twitch in Herbert's left eye that forewarned he was losing his patience. Nothing. Preston was sure it was the scotch.

"An amazing coincidence," Herbert said, drawing on his cigar. "I booked passage today on the *Munich Star*. I have to go to Stuttgart."

"For what?" Preston asked, having the sinking feeling his father would be leading him by the hand around Germany as he did at Niagara Falls when he was five.

"For the past year and a half, the firm has been in discussion with I.G. Farben to finance their new synthetic oil process."

"There's more than enough oil in the world. Why produce a synthetic version?" Preston asked, stretching out on the sofa.

Herbert continued sipping from his glass. "In the United States, we don't have any such need with the tremendous output from our Texas fields. For the Germans, it would be critical in a time of hostilities. All their oil is imported. A project to produce synthetics on such a scale requires tremendous capital."

"The hostilities would be with Britain and France. Aren't you choosing sides with the devil?" Preston countered.

"It's business, not politics. Besides, the might of France and Britain will change Hitler's mind. His ranting and raving over the Polish corridor is nothing but bluster." Herbert balanced the glass in his palm. "The research department has just completed a study on the Farben project. You will act as

my representative and deliver it to Farben's headquarters in Stuttgart, then have your holiday."

Preston could hardly speak. "What do I know about financing an oil project?"

"You have two weeks and will spend every waking hour learning everything there is to know." Herbert smashed the cigar into the ashtray. "You're a damn Princeton man and a Swedge. Make no mistake about this, you will go and do the company justice."

Preston stared at his father. "I'll do it."

"This calls for a toast," Herbert beamed. "Pour yourself a drink."

Preston made his way to the sideboard without hurry and poured a splash of scotch into a tumbler. Herbert raised his glass. "A new beginning."

Preston let the scotch hit his lips. "By the way, have you seen Millie?"

"You mean the Gardner girl from the third floor?" Herbert coyly asked.

"The one and the same."

"As a matter of fact, I saw her yesterday. If you're not interested in her, you're dumber than I thought."



Walters knocked on Preston's bedroom door. "Mr. Swedge. It is approaching ten o'clock. Your father is waiting in the car."

"Be right down," Preston said, fighting butterflies in his stomach, having spent the good part of the morning sitting on the toilet. He picked his leather satchel off the bed and tossed the note from his mother that was under his door when he got up at six into a wastepaper basket. Bernice wished a safe trip. She was off to Connecticut and a women's charity.

Walters waited at the curb, scooting around to the Packard's traffic side to open the rear passenger door for the newest Sterling Swedge executive. Preston took his place next to his father who was buried behind the first section of the *Times*. Herbert's not leaving for the office before six was unheard of. He folded the paper and placed it into his black leather attaché case. "All set?"

"As set as I'll ever be," Preston said unconvincingly.

The trip to the Hudson River pier was less than fifteen minutes. Walters slowed on 11th Avenue, going wide around trucks making deliveries to the multitude of fruit and vegetable stores. The German line, Hapag-Lloyd, was located between 37th and 38th Streets.

The *Munich Star* lay at anchor, awaiting the final boarding of its nine hundred passengers. A festive air surrounded a milling crowd, with balloons tethered to children's wrists and baskets filled with bottles of champagne despite a police presence rivaling Times Square on New Year's Eve.

"What a waste of the taxpayer's money, having to have the city provide security when a German vessel is in port," Herbert fumed. "Last week, a lunatic tried to throw a gasoline bomb aboard a cargo ship."

Walters deposited Preston's luggage in the designated area stacked with pieces that should have already been loaded on board. Preston and Herbert got out of the car. "Remember what I said about your briefcase," Herbert said.

"Not to leave it out of my sight," Preston replied irritated. "I'll defend the I. G. Farben papers with my life."

"I'm afraid *things* are going to be delayed," Walters said on his return.

In front of the gangway leading to the baggage hold, twenty stevedores armed with baseball bats faced off with the ship's crew. *Miss Velma*, the tugboat assigned to guide the *Munich Star* down the Hudson, gave three sharp toots of her horn and backed away.

"Those men think they can control international trade. This is becoming the norm when the longshoremen deal with German ships," Herbert said, looking at a young and very tall longshoreman who appeared to be the ringleader of the slowdown.

"Who's in charge?" Preston asked.

"These Italian gangsters are working on behalf of Roosevelt and Jewish money that backs the Democrats," Herbert fumed. "Jewish firms are furious they've been cut out of the business being conducted between Germany and the United States. If they were making a dollar from the Germans, the German Jew would be sacrificed in a heart beat and no one would give a damn."

"Jake, what do you want us to do?" one of the laborers asked the tallest one.

Jake pounded his bat against the dock. "Move it out." A signal was given to the tugboat and the *Miss Velma* churned the water on her return to the *Munich Star*. The showdown was over.

"Swedge! Over here!" called a familiar voice.

Preston surveyed the ship. Clark Johnson was standing along the rail on the main deck to the left of the bridge. "I'd better be going."

"Remember what I said," Herbert said.

Preston ignored his father, pausing at the base of the gangway to take a look at the large swastika painted on the *Munich Star*'s main smokestack.

Chapter 17

NEW YORK, NY MAY 1940

SIGNAL TROUBLE IN THE SUBWAY put Paul and Dave twenty minutes behind schedule. "I'm going to hit Danny's for a cup of coffee," Dave said as they hit the top step of the exit."

"I'm supposed to meet Sarah at the library. I'll see you at the lecture hall," Paul said. He sprinted across Washington Square to the entrance of Main Building and took the stairs to the ninth floor where Sarah was waiting at the return desk.

"What's going on?" Paul asked. The look of horror was on the faces of the normally cheerful library staff.

"The Germans attacked Holland and Belgium and are on the way to France," she said visibly upset.

No longer was the European calamity an afterthought on the N.Y.U campus. The German attack on Poland in September was unlike the Czech invasion which was accomplished without firing a shot. Reported live by CBS correspondents on the scene, the horrifying sounds of Stuka dive bombers indiscriminately slaughtering women and children in Warsaw flooded into their living rooms. British preparations for war and the nightly blackouts in London were the topics heard on Ed Murrow's broadcasts from England. While there had been no attacks on English soil, the country was on a war footing with children being sent to the countryside, barrage balloons flying overhead and sandbags piled up on street corners. Murrow reported that military and government personnel were carrying gas masks.

Paul turned ashen. "If the Germans are machine-like as in Poland, a swastika will be flying from the Eiffel Tower very soon."

“I’ve lost my motivation to spend the morning inside this building. I have to get some air,” Sarah lamented.

The couple went outside and crossed the street to the park. A flock of pigeons assembled, looking for a handout. Sarah searched her bag for a package of crackers she carried for a snack. She flipped pieces on the pavement. “This news is too much on top of last night’s. Minnah’s father and brother were picked up by the Gestapo six months ago.”

Paul put his arms around Sarah. Nothing he could say would change the facts—Minnah’s family was doomed and the world was on the precipice of destruction. “I have to get over to the lecture hall. Slocum invited some Wall Street mucky-muck. You better get your *tush* back into the library and get some work done.”

Paul watched Sarah re-enter Main Building and crossed the mall to enter Commerce. Dave was waiting outside the lecture hall talking to Sheldon Abramowitz, a senior who had already taken the *Introduction to Finance* course. Abramowitz was one of the few individuals on campus talking about the Nazi atrocities against German, Austrian, and Czech Jews. He wasn’t a member of the Faction as Jake had named the Jewish conspirators. Paul had recommended him to Jake, but after checking out various sources, it was decided that Sheldon was a loose cannon.

“This course isn’t that exciting to sit through it twice? What’s the story?” Paul prodded.

Abramowitz leaned against the wall “The guest speaker, Herbert Swedge, has a son who is active in a Nazi-loving organization. If the opportunity arises, I’m going to ask him about their activities.”

“You better be careful. Slocum is going to be really pissed if you work the guy over,” Paul warned. He had to admit that Abramowitz had guts.

Sheldon took a seat in the first row directly in front of the lectern. Paul pushed Dave to the rear of the auditorium. Professor Slocum entered the room and proceeded to give Herbert Swedge’s background, emphasizing their friendship went back to their undergrad days at Princeton. Swedge received a polite round of applause as he took center stage.

Herbert Swedge, impeccably attired in a dark blue suit, complete with vest and watch bob, had a commanding presence. He placed a notebook on the podium and produced a pair of glasses from his inside coat pocket. “If I

fall asleep please don't wake me up until the semester is over," Dave quipped.

Swedge droned on for forty-five minutes, giving the background of American investment in Europe, its benefits to American business and general economic health. As Herbert finished, a collective yawn spread about the room. The floor was opened to questions. Paul kept an eye on Abramowitz. Sheldon's right arm shot up. With his front row seat, Swedge couldn't help but call on him. "Mr. Swedge, in light of this morning's news of the German invasion of the low countries and the expected attack on France, how can you stand there and justify aiding the Nazi regime?" Is it not a fact that your firm has been instrumental in providing funding for the construction of synthetic oil facilities vital for the German military? Isn't it a fact that without American assistance, the Nazis' would not be in a position to conduct this war?"

Slocum jumped into the fray. "Mr. Abramowitz!" he shouted. "Having you in my class once was enough! I suggest you pick up your things and remove yourself from this room, *now!*"

Abramowitz shouted over Slocum, "Maybe we should thank your son Preston and the America First Committee for their work in keeping the United States out of the war." Abramowitz paused as profanities flowed from the rear of the lecture hall impugning the character of Swedge and his son. "Is it because they don't want to fight the Nazis, or that they don't want to interrupt the flow of money from the Nazi coffers?"

"Swedge is looking like he is going to blow his top," Paul said. "Louis didn't work over Schmeling like this is in the last fight."

Slocum turned to his friend as catcalls continued to flow from the rear of the lecture hall. "Herbert, you do not have to answer his questions."

A voice broke through the din, demanding Swedge answer the questions. A chorus of hecklers joined in the demand. Slocum turned a deep purple and threw up his hands.

Tony Repetti, the junior class president, stood and motioned for quiet. "Who wants answers to Sheldon's questions? Raise your hands."

The entire room was a sea of waving arms and shouts of demands for Swedge to be a man and answer the questions. Tony turned back to Swedge. "It appears, Mr. Swedge, that the bet has been raised. Are you going to see it? Or are you going to throw your cards in and leave the game?"

Herbert Swedge had never been one to run away from a fight. He repositioned himself behind the lectern, gripping it with both hands. He leaned forward, jutting his chin in defiance. "Mr. Abramowitz has drawn conclusions that are incorrect, and he has used these mistakes to intentionally form misleading statements."

Slocum stood at his side sternly watching the room. Paul wondered if he was mentally keeping notes on how people were reacting. Final grades for the semester were still to be turned into the registrar, and the professor had much discretion in the final decision.

Swedge continued, "American investors have the right to place their money in ventures that promise handsome returns. The only country that offered promise of return and appreciation of principle in the early part of the Depression was Germany. Where the greatest opportunity lay was in German heavy industry that required a massive infusion of cash. It is true that military orders fueled the expansion of the German economy, and that's how I forecast the United States will finally emerge from the Depression."

Shouts cascaded from the balcony demanding better answers. "Mr. Swedge," Repetti said, "I sense my fellow students want to know how you can justify aiding and abetting a monstrous regime that is founded on repression, intimidation and murder. If he didn't have foreign help, Hitler wouldn't be on the march."

Pandemonium was the situation. Slocum ended the lecture by pointing at Abramowitz. "I'm not finished with you." He turned and escorted Herbert from the room. As Abramowitz and Repetti walked up the aisle, the room exploded in cheers and applause. Dave and Paul made their way out through a side entrance and were waiting for Sheldon as he entered the hallway.

"My hat's off to you Sheldon." Dave asked, "I thought that I knew about most of the Nazi-loving opportunists. I never heard of Herbert Swedge or his son."

Sheldon put his arm around Dave's neck. "My boy, that's my little secret. I have more dirt on the high and mighty than you'll ever know. Rothstein, send my regards to your brother." Sheldon walked off with Repetti.

Paul felt a knot in his stomach. "How does he know about Jake, and who else is on to us?"

They made their way to the student center for a snack before their next class. The center was electric. Word had made its way through the student population that the Nazis were on their way to France. For the first time since the Czech invasion, the foreign students were clamoring for action. Paul found Sarah in the cafeteria line and eased in behind her. "I wish you were at the lecture. Sheldon Abramowitz bombarded the guest lecturer who is nothing but an apologist for the investment bankers who have financed Hitler. I'm afraid Slocum is going to take it out on us with the final exam."

Sarah moved her tray along the line, picking up a cottage cheese platter. Paul was always teasing her about the perpetual diet she was on. "What's going to happen to the people who managed to get to Belgium and Holland thought they were safe? I fear for the entire European Jewish population."

Paul tilted his head in the direction of some students sitting across the room. "What's going on with our French foreign exchange students? They didn't give a shit when the Germans were beating hell out of the Poles. Their silence was deafening. Now that the other democracies are being cut down like a field of wheat, they're upset."

"What are you doing tonight?" Sarah asked. "Maybe we could take in a movie. I could use a few hours escape from reality."

Paul would have liked nothing better, however, Jake called an executive committee meeting. Paul hadn't mentioned a word to Sarah about his clandestine activities. Trips upstate to the faction's training facility were becoming a problem. He was running out of excuses for not seeing her some weekends. Paul used a part time job on the pier with his brother as an excuse. It was plausible, he needed the money.

"I'd love to come over, but tonight my mother asked me to take her to a friend's house across Brooklyn and not in a great neighborhood. I'll see you tomorrow night."

Sarah understood what Paul was dealing with. "If it's not my parents asking me to do something for them, then it is Minnah." She leaned over and gave Paul a kiss. "I'll be looking forward to tomorrow."



With the end of class that Friday, a weekend respite began before exams. Paul was to meet Dave at 4:00 beside the subway entrance at West 4th Street. Dave was running late as usual, giving Paul the time to go over to the news kiosk and pick up the afternoon edition of the *Tribune*. The German army boasted their offensive was proceeding precisely as planned, but at a pace beyond the Wehrmacht's expectations. In Holland, airborne divisions seized intact bridges allowing tanks to cross flooded areas without difficulty.

The Associated Press reported massive bombing in Rotterdam. Within hours, explosions and fires decimated the center of the city. The Dutch, while putting up a spirited defense, were in retreat. Because of the consolidation of Dutch forces, the Belgian left flank was exposed, causing the Belgians to pull back. The Germans were in the process of crossing the Albert Canal. The Belgians highly touted fort, Eben Emael, said to be impregnable, fell to German airborne units.

Dave finally appeared. "Did you get a hold of Jake?"

Paul handed him the *Tribune*. "We're meeting at Katz's at six?"

The security breach with Abramowitz was a problem requiring immediate attention. They rode the subway without exchanging a word. When Paul arrived home, he found his father sitting in the living room listening to the CBS recap of the Nazi onslaught. Abe was still in his pajamas. "Sitting day after day before the radio isn't going to change anything."

Abe looked at Paul. "I have family over there and am powerless to help them. This news is just a confirmation of their deaths."

Before Paul could answer, Jake rushed into the apartment and slammed the door, drawing his mother out of her bedroom. "Paulie, I got two tickets to the Dodger game tonight. Get your stuff together."

It was a novelty to go to a night game. High intensity lights had just been installed in Ebbet's Field. Paul feigned surprise at Jake's excuse for missing their mother's traditional Friday dinner. "I've got a lot of studying to do."

"Kid, I busted my butt to get these." Jake waved the tickets in the air. "We have to get going, the game starts at 7:00."

"Baseball and the Dodgers," Rachel said, "Have fun."

They kissed their mother good-bye and left the apartment. "I've seen this guy Abramowitz a few times," Jake said. "I always thought the guy was a

schmuck, but maybe I've shortchanged him. When we get to Katz's, I want you to tell the committee all about him."

The committee was waiting in rear room. Jake broke protocol and announced they would examine various issues as the meal was served. By his look, those in attendance knew things were more serious than the news of the day. After a few remarks, Jake asked Paul to tell the members of the board the facts of the Abramowitz situation.

Paul went through the entire episode of the morning lecture. The three older members were not happy. "How much pull does this America First really have?" Lou Ginsberg asked.

"It's growing by leaps and bounds. Princeton University where Swedge's son is a sophomore, America First is becoming influential. Multiply that by the number of colleges across the country and they have a boatload of activists for the isolationist cause," Dave said.

"This Sheldon Abramowitz, he's from Brooklyn?" Ginsberg asked in a subdued tone. "I've never heard of him."

"He lives over on Fourth Avenue. Dave and I are only familiar with him from seeing him at school," Paul said between bites of his sandwich.

"I know Abramowitz's father Harry. He has a plumbing supply on Twenty-fifth. I've seen the kid in there, seems like a pretty smart young man, always polite and knows the business," Bernie Hershkowitz said.

"We have to recognize that we have a potential nightmare on our hands," Jake said, gesturing with a half-eaten pickle. "If Abramowitz knows of our activities, then others will. I suggest we invite him for a cup of coffee."

Paul pushed his plate away. "I don't think he'll voluntarily come."

"He's an egomaniac. He'll come," Jake said.

Harold Katz carried in seven cups of scalding tea. At eighty, while not an official member of the committee, he could sit and give advice. He placed the cups in front of each member, and then took an empty seat. There was definitely something on his mind, as he usually left them alone. "I don't mean to butt in, but there's a question I would like to ask." He deferred to Jake who nodded his approval. "Lindbergh."

Lou Ginsberg put down his spoon after stirring sugar in his tea. "Again with that nonsense! I thought we straightened that out. How many..."

Jake interrupted. Ginsberg didn't have any patience with Katz, calling him a dottering old fool behind his back. "Go ahead, Harold."

Katz stared at Ginsberg then continued, "The bastard travels around the country giving speeches on why the United States shouldn't get involved in Europe. He's on the radio as often as that hatemonger priest from Detroit."

Ginsberg pounded the table. "Tell us how we should kill Lindbergh. Why don't we do away with the priest too?"

Moe Feinberg couldn't contain his disbelief. "Harold, are you nuts or just senile? You're talking about murdering Charles Lindbergh. Maybe the pickle juice has had an affect on your brain."

Katz stood. "Okay, I'm nuts and senile. Mark my words, Lindbergh is big trouble." He went round the table clearing the dishes and left the room.

Jake looked at Moe. "He is not crazy or senile. I've been reading the same stories, and I understand Lindbergh is going to step up his number of radio broadcasts. With his popularity, he could force Congress to fight Roosevelt's attempt to aid the British and push the country further into isolationism. I think we have to have a contingency plan to deal with him."

Jake led the way from the back room and walked behind the refrigerated display case where Harold was trimming a large piece of corned beef. He waited for Ginsberg and Feinberg to pass. "I value your opinion," he said, shaking the old man's hand. "Don't mind those two."

Paul and Dave were in the backseat of Ginsberg's new blue Oldsmobile. Jake slid into the front seat and received a cold stare from Ginsberg who tightly gripped the wheel. "I shouldn't have lost my temper," Ginsberg said in a left-handed apology.

"Harold's entitled to his opinion," Jake said. "Let's go."

Ginsberg navigated to the other side of the borough and pulled into a parking space opposite the Abramowitz house. Paul didn't have any friends that lived in their own homes. The neighborhood was upper middle class and grass grew instead of concrete in the front yards. Paul and Dave exited the Olds as Jake said through the window, "Dave, stay on the sidewalk in case he tries to make a run for it."

Paul crossed the street, five strides ahead of Dave and climbed the steps to the front door. Poking its muzzle through the curtains on the old wood door, a collie began growling. Within seconds, Sheldon was looking at Paul. "To what do I owe this pleasure?"

Paul prepared to race back to the car if Abramowitz let the mouthful of teeth loose. Abramowitz opened the door grinning ear to ear. "I didn't think

you ventured outside of Flatbush.”

Paul didn’t take the bait. “My brother wants to know if you would like to go for a cup of coffee?”

Abramowitz stepped onto the landing and closed the door. “Let’s go see the master of the universe.”

The trio made their way across the street. Dave opened the left rear door and pointed to the middle of the seat. Lou started the big V-8 and pulled away. He drove no more than twenty-five miles an hour, aimlessly taking lefts and rights. Sheldon tried to appear relaxed, but his apprehension grew. Jake wasn’t in a hurry to break the ice, allowing Lou to tour the area.

“My brother told me about your speech today,” Jake said, without turning around. “Notoriety is not what produces results.”

Sheldon started to speak, but Jake cut him off. “You have a great deal of information on many subjects. What bothers me is your reference about me. To the best of my recollection, we’ve never met. Without bullshit, I want to hear how you know about the Faction.”

Sheldon waited to be sure that Jake was finished, not wanting to make a bad situation worse. They were on the way to Long Island. Arriving at an industrial section of Garden City, Ginsberg pulled into the parking lot of Dependable Trucking and killed the engine. Jake turned to Abramowitz cupping his right hand to his ear, indicating that he couldn’t hear him.

Sheldon cleared his throat that had gone dry. “Jake, I want to become a part of what you’re doing. We may not use the same tactics, but our aims are the same.”

Paul could sense that his brother was losing patience. He touched Sheldon’s elbow trying to move him off his soapbox. “Sheldon,” Jake said in a measured way, “I don’t want to hear what we agree on. I have to tell you, I’ve beat hell out of tougher and smarter guys than you. I’d hate for you to have your graduation party in the hospital.”

The N.Y.U. wrestling champ stammered, “When...you took over the camp in the Catskills, Bernie Hershkowitz bought plumbing supplies in a store owned by my uncle Nathan. At a family circle meeting, my uncle mentioned that a group of guys from Brooklyn were refurbishing the Hyman place, and did I know about it. Your men leave a mess up there. It’s amazing what you can gleam from somebody’s trash. When you talk to the locals, too many things are said. The words by themselves don’t make

sense, but when you put them together in the correct order, you have a story.”

Jake nodded to Lou who started the engine. The Oldsmobile was back on the main road doing the speed limit. There was no need to take a leisurely ride. Jake had heard more than he wanted. “Sheldon, you’re welcome to join with conditions. The first—you quit being a lone wolf and stop antagonizing people. Second, if you have some information, bring it to David and he’ll pass it on. We all want action, but it has to be sensible for it to have a chance of success.” He turned to Ginsberg, “I could use a cup of coffee, find a diner.”

Chapter 18

PRINCETON, NJ & NEW YORK, NY OCTOBER 1941

PRESTON FELT PARALYZED WITH a bout of junior year jitters. Second thoughts of economics as a major and carrying a heavy course load to amass the required credits to graduate on time resulted in sleepless nights and incessant stomach trouble.

Clark's insisting that they take advantage of their upper classmen status and move into the "influential" apartments in Pyne Hall had become a sore point in their relationship. Located on the far side of the campus, Preston found the three-mile roundtrip from the center of the campus grueling. For him, the slightly larger quarters outfitted with the same furniture as the other dorms and the "influential" residents weren't worth the exertion.

He returned to their rooms to find Clark reclining on their second-hand sofa with a tumbler of bourbon and water resting on his chest. Clark's blue sport jacket was draped over the back of the sofa. His suitcase stood on the coffee table next to a bottle of Wild Turkey and a Pennsylvania Railroad schedule.

"I must be walking five miles a day," Preston said, dropping his books on the credenza near the door.

Clark took a sip of his drink. "Maybe you should go back to the freshman dorm and live under the thumb of Ellis Price. Albert Hall is central to everything a mama's boy could desire."

"Fuck you," Preston said. He spotted the bourbon bottle and shook his head. "That bottle was full two days ago."

"Mostly water," Clark said, holding up his glass. "Been waiting since noon for you to drag your ass back. It's damn near four o'clock."

Motioning to Clark's suitcase Preston asked, "Going home for a meeting with Father Coughlin? He must be proud."

"I'm sure he is." Clark beamed with pride, having organized an America First rally on campus two days prior that packed Alexander Hall with a crowd of one thousand to hear Senator Gerald Nye from South Dakota oppose American intervention in the European conflict. "Pack a bag, you're coming with me." Fishing a telegram from his sport jacket, he held it out at arms length.

Preston snatched the Western Union message and walked to the bank of windows. "A love note from his Excellency Douglas Stuart Jr.," he said with contempt. Stuart, founder and head of the isolationist movement America First, had graduated Princeton in 1937. The son of the chairman of Quaker Oats had developed a strong friendship with Clark after a visit to the Princeton campus in 1940. "You said you weren't going to Madison Square Garden to hear Lindbergh after what happened in Des Moines. I guess this personal invitation to meet Lindbergh backstage is your prize for the other night."

Clark ripped the top off of a Lucky Strike pack and removed the last cigarette. His tobacco consumption had grown to two packs a day from a mere five cigarettes in his freshman year. He tossed the empty pack into a wicker wastebasket beside a credenza. "When are you going to get off Stuart's case?" he asked, lighting the smoke. "If it wasn't for him, we wouldn't have a forum to battle Roosevelt."

Preston handed the telegram back to his roommate. "Yes siree, America First sure is doing a bang up job. Lindbergh's speech in Iowa last month has essentially killed the movement, damaged him in the eyes of the American public and has done more for Roosevelt than the president could ever have wished for. He may be a hero, but his speeches border on the bizarre."

Clark bolted upright, splashing the bourbon on the leg of his pants. "Lindbergh is his own man." He wagged a finger at Preston. "Many Americans have the same opinions, and if he decided to run for the senate or the presidency, he'd have a groundswell of support."

"After Des Moines, I doubt that he could be elected dogcatcher in Bumblefuck, Montana," Preston replied. "When he abandoned the reasons for staying out of the European mess and decided to collectively label the

British, the Jews, and the Roosevelt administration as warmongers, the crowd became uneasy.”

Clark shifted to the edge of the couch and put the glass on the coffee table. His reaction to the Des Moines fiasco was much like Preston’s, except that he wouldn’t admit it. Lindbergh was turning into a public relations nightmare. The “Lone Eagle” was out of control.

Preston continued, “When Lindbergh says the greatest danger to our country is the Jewish influence in motion pictures, the press, radio, and the government, it makes middle America cringe. That statement could have been scripted in Berlin.”

Clark repeatedly puffed on the Lucky Strike. “America doesn’t want its boys’ blood spilled in Europe.” The growing cigarette ash fell onto his lap. He angrily swatted the mess to the floor.

“I don’t want it spilled either, considering mine will be in the pool,” Preston said, “but blaming the Jewish minority as the reason why this country is on track to go to war doesn’t pass the smell test. If that’s not bad enough, Lindbergh suggested Jews should be opposing intervention, neglecting to mention that the Germans are killing their people.”

“That’s not completely true,” Clark weakly protested. “He’s never condoned the German treatment of its Jewish population and has stressed that there had to be a solution without violence.”

“But,” Preston interrupted, “Lindbergh just couldn’t stop there. He had to make a veiled threat by saying that tolerance is a virtue that depends upon peace and the American Jewish community is placing themselves in a precarious situation, a situation that could easily develop.”

“Just like he said, the Jewish press has blown this out of proportion,” Clark said, jumping to his feet. “Just another ploy to discredit him.”

“Clark, maybe you’re right. I forgot that that he received a mountain of praise from Father Coughlin, the KKK and the Bund. Lindbergh was even attacked by Colonel Robert McCormick in his editorials in the *Chicago Tribune*. No one has ever accused McCormick of being a supporter of the Jewish community. He was so worried about the way the paper is viewed, that he came out swearing he’s not anti-Semitic.”

Clark folded the telegram and put it back into his pocket, ending the discussion. “So what’s it going to be? Are you going to come with me to

Madison Square Garden or not? The 5:48 will get us into your city by 6:50."

Preston rubbed the stubble on his chin. "I've got so much work to do and never go out on a Thursday night."

Wobbly, Clark stood holding onto the arm of the sofa. "You're off Fridays." He took the last drag on the cigarette that had burned close to his fingers and put the butt into the glass. "If Lindbergh can't turn it around tonight, America First is dead. I know how much you doubt the value of trying to keep this country out of the war, but we're approaching the eleventh hour. If all stops aren't pulled out, Roosevelt will be leading us into the European meat grinder."

Preston looked at his books, then to Clark. "What the hell, it gives me an excuse to go home and be tormented by the great Herbert Swedge. I'll pack a few things."

"We'll be back for the Halloween festivities," Clark said with a broad smile. "The grapevine says Albert Hall will continue the tradition of the great Ellis Price pumpkin drama."

The cab ride to Princeton Junction in the past would have been mundane, however Clark had achieved celebrity status from leading the America First rally on campus. The driver kept checking the rear view mirror as the yellow cab meandered the local roads. "I recognize you Mr. Johnson from the pictures in the paper."

"That's nice of you to say so," Clark said with a broad smile.

"If I were you, I'd be careful," the driver warned. "You may be a big shot in that high fullootin' school, but once you're on the street, it's a different matter. A lot of the people in town don't appreciate what you stand for. Maybe you should think about moving to Berlin, I'm sure they'd welcome you with open arms."

The cab didn't arrive at the station a moment too soon for Preston who was sure a fight was about to break out. The cab screeched to a stop curbside to the waiting room. The driver left the engine running as he scampered to the trunk and dropped the luggage onto the pavement. He banged the trunk closed, challenged Clark with a glare, and got back behind the wheel.

Clark reached into his pocket and produced two one-dollar bills, handing them through the driver's window. The driver took the bills, crumbled them

into a ball, and threw them back.

“As much as I need the money, I wouldn’t put anything you touched in my pocket,” the irate driver said. “I’d be afraid to catch whatever you have.” The cab sped off before Clark could reply.

Preston picked up his small leather duffle. “I can’t wait for the ride into the city. Maybe it would be a good idea if you’d put on a disguise—fake glasses and mustache. You can hide behind a newspaper, but make sure your picture isn’t on it.”

“Better to be cursed than unknown,” Clark said. He wasn’t smiling. “Loan me a couple of bucks, and I’ll buy the tickets. My wallet is empty, and I won’t receive my monthly stipend from my father for a few days.”

Preston wasn’t surprised. Clark had been running through money as if he had a printing press funding the America First rally. “You’re treating me with my own money. Nice touch. I’ll get the tickets, watch my bag.” He climbed a wooden staircase and disappeared into the waiting room.

The headlight of the *Mercantile Express* appeared in the distance. Originating in Pittsburgh, the twelve car train was one of the jewels of the Pennsylvania Railroad which boasted electrification of all its major lines. The change to electric locomotives allowed a seamless trip through the New York tunnels which had been closed to steam engines for safety concerns.

Preston exited the waiting room as the train came to a stop. The sleek bright steel cars reflected the setting October sun. Clark had drifted toward the tracks with the luggage in tow. Standing on the gravel apron, a conductor pointed to an open stairwell in the middle of the train.

Preston handed Clark a ticket and climbed the steps into the coach six cars behind the locomotive. All seats were occupied. They walked to the rear of the train and found two seats in the coach next to the dining car. Clark placed his suitcase in the overhead luggage compartment and took the seat next to the window. Preston deposited the duffle behind his feet under an aisle seat. “We’re going to have plenty of time to get to the Garden,” he said with confidence.

Clark shrugged his shoulders and emitted what sounded like “I hope so” and shut his eyes. Preston retrieved a copy of *The New York Times* from the seat across the aisle. The lead article was about the N.Y.P.D.’s anticipation of serious opposition to Lindbergh’s appearance. Deputy Chief Inspector John W. Conway said seven hundred police under his command would be

on hand to deal with all lawbreakers. The article went on to list street closures and detours. He glanced at Clark who had fallen asleep and thought about what the cabbie said. He had little use for Lindbergh and loathed Charles Coughlin, and yet he was on his way to an American First rally. He feared he was infected and hoped it wasn't fatal.

Clark awoke as the train entered the tunnel under the Hudson River. He ran his hands through his hair and checked his watch. "It's 6:45. We still have to get uptown."

"Trouble," Preston said, pointing to the newspaper. "The subway isn't stopping at Fiftieth. All traffic is being diverted around the Garden for a block on either side, including cabs and busses."

Exiting the tunnel, the train slowed to a crawl as it approached the station. The rail yard was littered with thirty years of rusting train parts, spent locomotives and railcars. The conductor walked through the car announcing that Penn Station was the final stop and to collect all belongings. Preston tapped Clark on the shoulder. "We need to get off as soon as this tin can comes to a stop."

Clark retrieved his suitcase and followed Preston to the front of the car. With the conductor out of sight, Preston unhooked the safety chain and stepped onto the platform before the train came to a stop. Clark did the same but with a stumble, falling onto his right knee as his suitcase slid on the concrete. "I hurt my knee!" Clark whined.

Preston raced to retrieve the suitcase. "I'll get Stuart to kiss your booboo. Come on, we've got to get a cab." He scrambled up the steps cutting a swath through the crowd rising to the street. With moves learned on the football field at Choate, he left Clark to shove aside those unwilling to heed his call to get out of his way.

The football field size waiting room was designed to resemble a granite lined Roman bath and the Basilica of Constantine that was represented by a glass ceiling 150 feet high. During the day, sunlight lit the station, at night the stars and moon offered commuters an astronomical show.

Clark lagged as he hit the Italian marble floor. Preston waited for Clark to catch up and grabbed his suitcase. They made their way out of the main entrance on Eighth Avenue. A waiting line for taxis serpentine around the corner to Thirty-fourth Street. "This calls for drastic measures," Preston announced. He fished a five dollar bill from his pocket and strode to the

head of the line, thrusting the bill into the hand of a silver haired woman about to enter a waiting yellow cab. "This should be adequate compensation for stealing your ride." He motioned for Clark to get into the cab. "Forty-eighth and Eighth," he said to the cabby, sliding into the rear seat. The woman stood at the curb with her mouth agape examining her bonanza.

Clark manhandled the suitcase onto the seat and slammed the door closed. The cabby turned to look at his passengers. "You guys going to the Garden?"

"I'm trying to get home," Preston said, bracing for a repeat of the afternoon's near altercation.

"Good," the grizzled cabby said as he gave them a suspicious look. A baseball bat was propped against the front seat. "Every friggin' Nazi lover and no backbone pussies are heading there. I've taken a dozen up there since five o'clock." He shifted the battered '32 Checker into gear and eased into the flow heading uptown.

The hack license pinned to the front passenger sun visor read Milton Goldstein. Clark turned to Preston and mouthed "Jew." He cleared his throat and said to the cabby, "Amazing they have the balls to hold an America First meeting in New York."

Goldstein cut in front of a bus and accelerated through a traffic light that had turned red. "What do you mean?" he asked with an edge to his voice.

"The largest Jewish population in the United States is here in New York. This organization America First and its poster boy Lindbergh are hell bent on keeping the country out of a war that threatens the entire Jewish European community," Clark said.

The traffic slowed as they approached Fortieth Street. "You my friend, speak the truth. No way should the Garden be allowed to be used for shit like America First," Goldstein fumed. "Some nonsense about their rights under the Constitution. I'd give them their rights with a stick of dynamite."

"Lindbergh has to be collecting a paycheck from Berlin," Clark said, giving Preston an elbow to the ribs. "I'd give him something to remember about his trip to the city."

At Forty-sixth Street, police cars blocked the right two lanes of Eighth Avenue forcing traffic into one lane. "Security for these mutts is sure tight," Clark remarked.

The traffic came to a complete stop. "A half-hour ago I got to Forty-eighth before I had to turn," Goldstein said. "What do you want me to do?"

"We'll get out here," Preston said, handing Goldstein the fare plus a generous tip.

Clark took hold of the suitcase. "Good talking to you," he said to the cabby. "It's a crying shame what they're doing." He slammed the door closed.

Preston could only shake his head. "Having fun?"

"It was worth the trip," Clark said with a laugh.

"We'll have to hoof it." Preston cut through the traffic to the east side of the street. At Forty-eighth, horse mounted police were keeping a clutch of protestors armed with placards denouncing America First and Charles Lindbergh away from wooden sawhorses parked end to end across the breadth of Eighth Avenue. A three foot gap between sawhorses allowed one person to pass at a time. A police sergeant said wearily to Clark, "Tickets to the show or a reason for going to Forty-ninth or Fiftieth."

Clark produced his backstage passes, drawing a look from the cop. "Hope you have a good time," the sergeant sarcastically said as he stepped aside.

The crowd grew exponentially as they neared the Garden. The controlled atmosphere deteriorated. Leon Birkhead and his Friends of Democracy had circumvented the security measures and infiltrated through the barricades. A breeze blowing from the Hudson River didn't cool the hotheads chanting for Lindbergh's neck. America First supporters tried to drown them out by singing America the Beautiful. Preston pulled Clark by the sleeve of his jacket into the recess of the entrance to an F.W. Woolworth store. "How are we going to get through the sea of bodies?" Preston asked. "There must be ten-thousand people in these streets."

"Let's backtrack," Clark said. "There's a rear entrance to the Garden on Fifty-first Street. I saw it the last time I went to see Stuart at his office. Come on. We are running short on time."



Members of the Faction drifted into the area having ridden different subway lines into Manhattan from Brooklyn. Tickets to the event weren't difficult to obtain with America First papering the city. Jake Rothstein surveyed the scene from a position fifty yards behind a cordon of uniformed police whose mission was to keep clear an area designated for charter buses. The rally organizers were supplying free transportation from New Jersey and Connecticut. Bernie Hershkowitz and Sheldon Abramowitz buried themselves in the crowd on either side of the main entrance.

As chartered busses attempted to pass through a final set of sawhorses, the crowd began throwing rocks, bottles, rotten fruit, and eggs. The police charged and began dragging protestors toward a paddy wagon.

"Birkhead has done a great job of bringing out this crowd," Jake said to his brother. "The problem is rotten eggs aren't stopping the faithful from going into the Garden." He checked his watch. "It's seven o'clock. "You sure you can leg it from Fifty-first?"

"Piece of cake," Paul said as he hobbled off on an ankle sprained on a recent weekend at the Faction's Catskill Mountain training facility.



Lou Ginsberg got off the subway at Broadway, walked west toward Seventh Avenue, and stood on the southeast corner of Fiftieth. Seventh Avenue wasn't in the box closed for Garden rally, and the police presence was limited to two middle-aged cops whose exercise regimens consisted of twirling their nightsticks. It was a typical Manhattan Thursday night with couples and groups of four and five heading for the multitude of jazz clubs in the area. He waited for two cycles of the traffic light then crossed the street and followed a young couple arm in arm strolling toward Eighth Avenue.

Mid-block, Ginsberg looked over his shoulder—he didn't see the two cops. Slowing his pace, Ginsberg crossed the street and disappeared into an alley. Ten feet wide, the trash filled passage wound behind buildings on Fifty-first that faced the rear of Madison Square Garden. Ginsberg waited for his eyes to adjust to the fading light. Something rustled to his right. He

dropped to a knee, flashing a midget flashlight at the sound, catching the rear end of a rat scurrying under a pile of newspapers.

Rats. They revolted him in the daylight when he worked in the tenements of Red Hook. The fifty-six-year old electrician wanted to bolt back into the neon lights of Seventh Avenue. He counted three doors on the right. Using a key purloined from the building manager, Ginsberg unlocked the burglar proof steel door and took the four steps down to the basement. He crouched behind an insulated pipe stenciled "MAIN STEAM." The utility room was quiet except for the hum of an electric motor.

Overhead light bulbs cast assorted shadows on the floor. Easing into an aisle traversing a maze of pipes, Ginsberg knocked away cobwebs with his hand. Placing one foot ahead of the other, he crossed the hundred feet distance and came to a halt. On one of the practice runs, Ginsberg had seen the three-hundred pound night maintenance man sleeping on a beach lounge in a small office near the stairs to the lobby. The office was vacant.

Ginsberg took the stairs to the unoccupied lobby. With the expected trouble at the Garden, offices in mid-town closed early. He moved to the wall of mailboxes. Using a key for box number 555 assigned to an unrented office, he removed a package wrapped in brown paper addressed to Mrs. Dinah Myte. He re-checked the lobby and took the steps to the second floor.

Standing on the landing waiting for the pounding in his chest to stop, Ginsburg listened for "anything that sounded human" following Jake's directive that the aim of the operation was to hinder the flow of people into the Garden not murder. If office 220 was occupied, the mission was to be aborted.

Ginsberg checked the sign posted opposite the landing— offices 210-220 were to the right. He proceeded to the end of the hall. The glass paneled door was dark. Ginsberg tapped twice and placed his ear to the glass. Using a set of lock picks, he slipped the tumblers and stepped into the office.

Ginsberg switched on his flashlight. The layout of the office was as described by the member of the Faction who delivered mail to America First and had deposited the package in the mailbox during the daily afternoon pickup. He placed the package on a cocktail table situated in front of the windows overlooking the street.

Ginsberg removed the paper wrapper from a cardboard box and lifted the lid: four sticks of dynamite, a dry-cell battery, one detonator cap, pre-cut

strands of bell wire, and a Westclock alarm clock.

The veteran of the battle of Belleu Wood in 1917 volunteered to wire the components together and set the timer, boasting that he could do the job with his eyes closed. Now he questioned his sanity as his hands shook and the pounding in his chest wouldn't stop. Ginsberg took a deep breath, wiping his hands on his pants. Within a minute, he assembled the components.

Ginsberg looked through the blinds. Police cars blocked both ends of the block with uniform cops standing at the ready behind sawhorses cordoning off the rear entrance of the Garden. While it was still possible to injure innocents, the odds were high. He set the timer for 7:15.



Preston led the way, dissecting a path back across the street. "If we can't get in, through the rear, we'll be in a worse position than if we just waited."

Paul leaned against a light pole on Fifty-first two hundred feet from the rear service entrance to the Garden. He kept an eye on the police manning the barricades and the office building diagonally across the street housing the offices of America First. The police seemed relaxed—that side of the Garden was comparatively quiet but for a handful of protestors.

With the rear entrance in sight, Clark gave Preston a punch on the arm. "I'm right as usual," he said, running into Paul with his suitcase.

Paul spun around and grabbed Clark by the shirt. "Watch where you're going shithead." The pudgy face looked familiar. He checked the tall friend who took a step toward him—the Princeton schmucks as Jake called them. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw one of the cops come from behind the barricade. Getting run-in for something stupid wasn't going to happen. He let go of Clark's shirt. "Forget it."

Preston said, "It's almost seven-fifteen, let's go."

Clark gave Paul one last look and moved on saying just loud enough for Paul to hear, "A typical New York asshole."

Paul checked his watch—7:14:30. The two Princeton schmucks were a half-minute from the America First building. He turned and began walking

away, then stopped to look back.

Clark gave Preston one of the backstage passes as he pointed to the silver lettered window at 1455 Fifty-first. Preston could easily read “America First Committee” from across the street. He looked at the pass and said, “I hope this is worth the trouble.”

Jake turned his back to the crowd and reached inside his jacket. From a pouch sewed into the lining, he removed a three-inch firecracker. The explosion on Fifty-first reverberated for four blocks in every direction. Unsure of what happened, the sea of protestors and counter-protestors stopped in their tracks.

Jake lit the firecracker, whirled and threw it to the left of a bus waiting to discharge its passengers. As Bernie Hershkowitz flailed his arms and shouted, “There’s a gun on the bus,” Abramowitz lit a string of midget firecrackers. The sound of rapid pistol fire filled the plaza.

The crowd snapped back to life, half running toward the main entrance of the Garden, the other half surging toward the buses. A uniformed patrolman momentarily looked at Jake but was bowled over by the rampaging mob. Without any further coaxing, the bus was rocked onto its side.

Jake slipped out of the melee and ran toward where he had last seen Hershkowitz. The near sixty-year-old had been knocked to the pavement and was struggling to get to his feet as a college age behemoth taunted him.

Jake reached into the pouch and slipped his fingers into a pair of brass knuckles, delivering a series of quick punches. The kid went down on the pavement spitting his front teeth into his hands. Jake kicked the back of his head for good measure. “Time to get the hell out of here,” Jake screamed above the tumult as he pulled Hershkowitz to his feet.

Hershkowitz wiped the perspiration from his face with the sleeve of his jacket. “I saw Sheldon take a nightstick across the kisser,” he roared. “I don’t see him.”

“I’ll find him, you get going,” Jake ordered.

Police reinforcements flooded into the area from Eighth Avenue with their nightsticks buzzing. Jake turned ninety degrees to the north side of the street, spotting Abramowitz propped against a mailbox. Jake dropped any pretext of blending into the crowd and ran toward him.

Abramowitz cradled his left arm against his chest as he breathed heavily through his mouth. He was bleeding from his nose and both eyes had turned a deep purple. The sleeves of his dark green jacket were soaked with blood. Jake handed Abramowitz his handkerchief.

“That fat Irish fuck whacked me at least a dozen times,” Abramowitz said, wiping his nose and mouth. “He said that nobody gets away with shit when O’Brien is on duty.”

Jake turned to a line of police attempting to corral a dozen protestors. “Which one?”

“Not there!” Abramowitz struggled to his feet. “The one standing by himself in front of Woolworth’s.”

In the entrance of F. W. Woolworth stood a husky cop smacking his nightstick against the palm of his hand. As Jake watched Abramowitz’s assailant, Paul approached from the opposite side of the street.

“We’ve got big trouble,” Paul said.

Jake whirled around and grabbed his brother by the neck. “What are you doing here? You were assigned to watch Fifty-first.”

“Two guys got flattened by debris from the explosion,” Paul said as he tried to loosen Jake’s vice-like grip. “I got a good look at them as they passed me on the corner. I’d swear on mom’s life they’re the two schmucks from Princeton.”

Jake let go. “Alive or dead?”

“I don’t know,” Paul said, trying to rub the sting from his neck. “Two cops were clearing bricks and glass off of them. Another was calling for an ambulance on the car radio.”

“If they’re taken to the hospital and not the morgue, Bellevue will be the place,” Abramowitz said. “I’ll call my cousin.” His cousin was a second year medical resident on emergency room rotation and a member of the Faction.

“Get out of here now. Paulie, drag him if you have to.” Jake ordered.

Paul supported Abramowitz under the arm and moved off. To Jake’s relief, one of Leon Birkhead’s legions offered to help. He watched the trio

make their way toward Seventh Avenue. The commander of the Faction had a knot in his stomach—even though he didn't give a damn whether the two Princeton schmucks were dead, the fallout was going to be brutal. With the Swedge kid's father being a heavy hitter on Wall Street, the N.Y.P.D. response to the explosion was going to be greater than if Al Capone returned to the city to set up shop. Maybe old man Katz was correct, they should've greased Lindbergh.

Jake took two strides toward Woolworth's as he lined up his target. Running like a linebacker straight at the cop he yelled, "Officer, you gotta help me."

As the unsuspecting policeman turned, Jake's brass knuckles found his nose.

Chapter 19

BROOKLYN, NY DECEMBER 1941

THE FACTION'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE drifted into the back room of Katz's. Jake watched as they removed their coats and gloves. *Kibitzing* wasn't on their minds. The prior twenty-four hours had passed in a blur. The country was rallying around Franklin Roosevelt whose voice came through their radios with words they understood. Nine years before, he calmed them with his fireside chats as the Depression ripped their lives apart believing when he said "that they had nothing to fear but fear itself."

This day Roosevelt didn't speak from the cozy environs of the White House and tell the nation that all would be alright. The president appeared before the combined houses of Congress declaring "December 7, 1941 a day that would live in infamy" following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He warned the country was facing grave danger and the military had suffered innumerable casualties, but stated without hesitation that the United States would "win with absolute victory."

"The Japanese are attacking Malaya, Hong Kong, Guam, the Philippines, Wake Island, and Midway Island. There are reports of American ships being torpedoed between San Francisco and Honolulu," a somber CBS staff newsman recapped the disastrous news.

"Turn it off," Jake said. Sheldon Abramowitz reached behind him and switched off the Philco.

"My cousin's kid was on the Arizona," Sam Bernstein said. "He sent me a picture of the battle wagon at anchor in Honolulu. Crazy kid. Who ever heard of a Jewish boy joining the navy?"

"In a couple of days, the Nazis are going to declare war on us because of the pact they have with the Japs," Sheldon offered.

Harold Katz wandered into the room with a tray of cups in one hand and a pot of coffee in the other. A bowl of sugar cubes was in the middle of table. "Help yourselves," he said and wearily took a seat.

All eyes turned to Jake. "I've called this meeting to address what Sheldon said, the Germans are going to declare war on the United States and Roosevelt is going focus on Europe." He poured a cup of coffee.

"I don't know about that," Moe Feinberg said, lighting a cigarette. The butt dangled from his lower lip. "The Japs are running through the Pacific like shit through a goose. The country is mad as hell and wants to kill every yellow bastard."

Jake took a sip. "When the first bomb fell on Hawaii, the isolationists went kaput. Roosevelt doesn't have to kiss ass anymore. Without direct intervention by the United States, the Brits are going to lose and Hitler will control Europe."

Paul waved at the smoke drifting into his face from Feinberg's cigarette. "That being said, the Faction's mission is over. The Bund and every other fascist organization have been smashed. Now Jews can't be blamed for the United States entering the war. The draft is going to call every Jew and Gentile able to walk. We're in this fight together."

Bernie Hershkowitz stuck his hand out toward Feinberg. "Give an old man a cigarette," he said in his thick Polish accent. Feinberg tossed him a Pall Mall which was immediately rolled under his nose that bore the results of numerous fights. Hershkowitz savored the aroma before he struck a match. "Nothings changed for our brothers in Poland and all the countries the Nazis have taken. They're rounding Jews up by the thousands."

Jake pounded on the table. "The Faction was conceived to protect our own in this country. Now that the threat has passed, we move on to phase two." The room grew silent waiting for Jake to continue. "With the right connections, members can be placed into positions inside the military chain of command. Right now, the top levels of our government don't have European Jews on the top of their list, and I doubt they ever will. I'm not sure where the placement of Faction members will lead. It's not a question of if, but when opportunity will show its face. When it does, we better be in position to take advantage."

Sam Bernstein, pale and twenty pounds thinner since suffering a "mild" heart attack the night he assisted Jake placing explosives in the Brooklyn

Bund spoke up, "Chicago and Cleveland have to be included."

Jake pushed his cup away. "I spoke to them this morning."

Harold Katz nervously wiped his hands on a towel tucked into his pants that served as an apron. He cleared his throat. "Who wants a piece of cake?"

Jake subscribed to the theory that morals and decency always take a back seat to the smell of dollars. He slipped an envelope into his woolen parka and waited in the hall of the family's apartment, listening for footsteps on the cranky wood floor. It had been another long night with his father. The thought of dealing with what the doctors called hardening of the arteries made Jake sick to his stomach.

Paul stayed overnight in the Bronx, having been caught in a heavy December snow the paper forecasted to be nothing more than a flurry. Jake, once jealous of his younger brother who had found the girl of his dreams, now worried about the couple. The draft was going to take them apart and one never knew what fate had in store. He carefully closed the door and made his way down the stairs to the street.

Wind gusts whipped the coarse snow into his eyes. A handful of cars made their way along Flatbush Avenue with their tire chains cracking against the pavement. The normal morning shoppers out for their papers and hot bagels were extra light for a Sunday morning. Jake crossed the street stopping to see Hymie Blankstein the Kosher butcher. What could Jake say to console a man who received a postcard from his sister who wrote a mere six lines saying she and her family had been relocated to a place called Auschwitz?

Jake shook Hymie's hand and made his way to the corner, stepping into the doorway of Solomon's Pharmacy to get out of the stiff wind. Across the street, a sign in a storefront window read, "Congressman Benjamin Goodman—11th United States Congressional District." The window and its glass door were obscured by white curtains that reminded Jake of the linings of expensive caskets he had seen when attending the wakes of

associates who lost their lives working both for and against his boss. A steady stream of women wearing babushkas and men braving the elements in their best clothes meant for the synagogue came and went.

Jake waited for a sanitation truck outfitted with a plow to pass down the middle of the avenue. Careful not to slip on the icy pavement, Jake crossed and knocked off the clumped snow on his shoes against a lamp post.

A brass bell tinkled as he opened the door. The twenty-by-twenty waiting room consisted of wood benches, a receptionist's window, an American flag, and a photo of the man every Democratic politician wanted to be identified with— President Franklin Roosevelt.

Jake wrote his name on a sheet of paper handed to him by the receptionist. The audience with the twelve term congressman was on a first come first served basis. Jake took off his coat and sat on the windowsill of the storefront window. German, Polish, Hungarian, and Yiddish flowed in a current circulating around the room. Nods and fingers touching hat brims were sent Jake's way. Growing up in the neighborhood brought Jake into contact with hundreds he knew by sight. They had one thing in common; their worries were stamped on their weathered faces.

Benjamin Goodman catered to his constituency. An ad in the Yiddish daily announced the congressman was back in the district, and his office would be open eight to twelve Sunday morning. The working stiff and the *Shabbos* observant were the ones who couldn't make it during regular business hours and had trekked through the snow to see their Benny, a self-made man who went to college and law school at night while working in the garment district during the day.

For an hour and a half, Jake watched the hopefuls enter Goodman's inner sanctum with tense smiles to return to the waiting room with tears streaming down their cheeks. Jake looked away, not wanting to intrude on their mourning. They came to Goodman knowing that the possibility of obtaining a visa to the United States for their European family members was futile, but doing nothing would result in living a lifetime of self-flagellation for not trying.

"Mr. Rothstein, you can go in," announced the receptionist.

Jake entered the rear area that had been partitioned into three small cubicles with furniture that looked like it was purchased from the second hand store three blocks away. Directly ahead was the congressman's office.

Goodman, at five foot five, was as tall as he was wide. Sans suit jacket, a gray vest covered a white shirt and navy blue tie. Sleeves were rolled at the cuffs giving the appearance of a man hard at work. Goodman's cherubic face turned oatmeal pasty as Jake, with his coat slung over his shoulder, came into view.

"What are you doing here?" Goodman asked. "I did what Bavosa wanted. It was a one shot deal."

When Tommy Bavosa ran into resistance in his bid to land a government contract with the Navy, Goodman was approached. As the ranking member on the appropriations committee for the War Department, Goodman could put in "the word." When he resisted, a picture of the very drunk congressman with a woman not his wife, changed his mind. Jake had accompanied Bavosa to the meeting held in a motel in Westchester. The idea of a hulking Jew intimidating another Jew wasn't lost on Tommy the Corkscrew. "Take it easy, congressman. This visit is personal."

Goodman took a deep breath and reluctantly ushered Jake into his office. "Have a seat," Goodman said, sitting at his desk. The diminutive congressman wiped his forehead with a monogrammed handkerchief retrieved from his back pocket.

In contrast to the cubicles, Goodman's office was outfitted with a mahogany desk and leather chairs. Civic awards, diplomas, and photos that captured his political life filled the walls. Framed pictures of his wife and three daughters were displayed on his desk.

Joe took a seat and placed his coat on the adjacent chair. "I wouldn't have come to see you, but I don't know where else to turn."

Goodman puffed out his chest and looked up to the ceiling. "The man upstairs couldn't get another soul into the country." He removed a gold cigarette case from the center drawer of the desk and flicked a matching lighter. Smoke trailed from his lips. "Breckinridge Long, that fucker over at the State Department, has tied up visas with rules and regulations an attorney specializing in international law couldn't understand."

"I understand, but ...," Jake said.

Ash exuded onto the desk as Goodman stubbed the cigarette into an ashtray already teeming with butts. "You're a first. I'm glad you understand." Goodman rose, and extended his hand.

Jake reached into his coat. Goodman stepped backward as if was preparing to run. To the congressman's relief, an envelope appeared in Jake's hand instead of a .45 automatic that was brandished under his chin when Tommy Bavosa thought he needed an additional reason to help a local businessman. "My problem is the draft."

Goodman returned to his chair, the color returning to his face. He dumped the ashtray into a wastebasket under the desk and lit another cigarette, keeping an eye on the envelope. He took two puffs on the cigarette, trying to calculate what Jake had in mind. "Military service is another matter." A grin broke across tissue paper thin lips with the image of the Brooklyn tough guy slinking out of the induction station.

Jake leaned forward. "As the ranking member on the appropriations committee you can pull strings."

Rocking back in the brown leather chair, Goodman rolled the cigarette between his thumb and index finger. "It's not that easy. The local boards make the decisions. A guy on the Dodgers called me, there's nothing I can do for him." He pointed the cigarette at Jake. "My own doctor is preparing to close his office. In a month, he'll be gone."

Jake placed the envelope onto the edge of Goodman's desk. "I'm not interested in staying out."

Goodman dropped the cigarette into the ashtray. "You've lost me."

"A number of my associates are going to join up. I want them placed in areas that might be advantageous in the future," Jake said, keeping his hand on the envelope as he inched it towards the middle of the desk.

"Associates" in Jake's world was synonymous with a crew assembled to boost a truck for its cargo. Goodman thought supply depots and warehouses as he tapped his fingers to the beat of a hissing radiator behind him. His pro-union election slogan "fair pay for fair work" applied to any proposal that crossed his desk. If a buck was going to be made on the strength of his back, he expected to be compensated. He looked at the envelope suspiciously. "And Luciano and Bavosa have no connection to your associates?"

"That's correct." Jake took a piece of Wrigley's from his jacket pocket and popped it into his mouth. He rolled the silver wrapper into a tight ball.

"When do you need this done?" Goodman asked, lighting his third cigarette.

“Immediately. I need your assurance that things can be arranged.” Jake worked the gum hard.

Goodman coughed to clear his throat, unsure about asking what was the purpose of the scheme. “How many?”

“Twenty-five. Some will be coming from outside New York.”

Despite the coolness of the office, beads of sweat appeared on Goodman’s forehead. “Twenty-five and multiple process centers?” Goodman shook his head. “This is a tall order.”

Jake pushed to envelope to the middle of desk. “This should smooth things. An equal amount will be delivered on a satisfactory completion.”

Goodman hesitated taking the envelope, his clear enameled nails reflected light from the desk lamp. By taking the envelope, the congressman would be signing a contract. He picked up the envelope, and opened the flap. Fifty Benjamin Franklins stared back. “I’ll need a list of names and addresses.”

Jake stood, handing Goodman a typed list. “I’ll be in touch.”

“All of these names are Jewish,” Goodman said incredulously. “Is this part of...”

“A Jewish Boy Scout unit,” Jake said with a laugh.

Chapter 20

WASHINGTON, DC OCTOBER 1942

HIS HEART RACED AT THE SHRILL RING of the phone. Preston answered with a quick “Yes Mrs. Higgins” then straightened the knot of his U.S. Army issued tie. He’d been waiting for this call for two weeks after arriving in Washington, D.C. from Fort Benning, Georgia. His orders at the completion of Officers Candidate School were simple: report for assignment to the War Department on E Street, Room 201.

Room 201 belonged to Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy appointed in April 1941 at the behest of the Secretary of War, Henry Stimson. A Wall Street veteran, McCloy had established a name for his work in the corporate and securities areas. With investment bankers pushing German bonds, McCloy spent considerable time in Europe, particularly Germany.

For his knowledge of Germany, McCloy was appointed to investigate what came to be called the Black Tom Case. During World War I, American industry became the target of Germany spies and saboteurs, resulting in the loss of lives and property. Years of litigation finally produced an agreement for compensation.

In June of 1936, McCloy traveled to Munich where Hitler’s deputy Rudolph Hess refused to sign any documents concerning events prior to the establishment of the Third Reich. Hess and Hermann Goering, the German Air Force head, asked McCloy to stay for the Olympic Games in Berlin and see the miracles of the *new* Germany. McCloy returned to the United States convinced the country better prepare for war.

McCloy, with his reputation as an expert on German spies, pushed for the creation of an intelligence apparatus before the United States was involved

in the oncoming war. He advocated that the government, in the name of national security, could indulge in wiretaps, mail intercept, and the decoding of radio messages directed to foreign embassies in the country.

Roosevelt, needing Wall Street support for his programs to end the Depression and his planned military buildup, brought the staunchly Republican Stimson into his cabinet. By 1940, Stimson was using McCloy as his troubleshooter. McCloy had found a legal way for the president to send twenty B-17s to the British. It was McCloy who termed the United States “the arsenal of defense,” and it was the United States that kept England alive.

McCloy’s stewardship of Lend Lease brought invaluable contacts in Congress he used to advance his agenda of putting the country on a war footing. Convinced the Germans were involved in sabotage and were behind numerous labor disputes in the defense industry, McCloy sought and nurtured a relationship with FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover who increased the volume of wiretaps and mail intercepts without Justice Department approval. McCloy espoused the position that the events of the day required unusual action, even if it meant infringing on the rights of the individual.

Preston put on his solid khaki green dress jacket and checked the crease in his pants. He was happy to get out of the office and away from the mountain of facts and figures covering war production. Economics was his college major, but he had no knowledge of steel rivets or the technical aspects of mining bituminous coal. He locked the door and negotiated a warren of narrow hallways to the main corridor to find himself surrounded by shoulders stacked with gold braid and chests covered with campaign ribbons and medals. With the War Department being housed in seventeen different buildings strewn across the city, a new building to centralize operations was under construction near Arlington National Cemetery. The five-sided structure was unofficially being called the Pentagon. Independent design experts branded it a monstrosity and blight on the countryside.

The sound of pounding typewriters echoed off the granite tiled floor as he approached the outer office of room 201. Preston smartly saluted an exiting redfaced two-star general. McCloy’s main mission was to act as Stimson’s point man and troubleshooter. He had little time or inclination to deal with fools and incompetents. Ambiguous answers resulted in scores of resignations from the top-heavy general officer corps.

The cacophony of steel letters to paper was the labor of the three women secretarial pool trying to keep pace with McCloy's reports and "take a letter" demands. The silver haired Mrs. Higgins swiveled her head away from her typewriter. "Take a seat lieutenant."

Two oak benches occupied the right side of the room. Preston did as commanded, taking a seat closest to the door. In less than five minutes, the portal to the assistant secretary opened. Preston jumped to his feet as Charles Lindbergh passed. The Lone Eagle was in town lobbying for support to regain his commission in the Army Air Corps, having quit after receiving a public tongue lashing from President Roosevelt. From the look on the hero's face, Preston surmised his meeting with McCloy didn't go well.

Mrs. Higgins sang out, "Lieutenant! Time is precious."

Preston felt his knees wobble as he gathered himself off the bench. He paused at the tri-paneled door, took a deep breath and entered. "Lieutenant Swedge reporting as ordered," he said, snapping to attention.

McCloy sat behind an oversized desk piled with files marked "Secret" and "Eyes Only." Still possessing the build of a wrestler, the nearly bald forty-five year old assistant secretary of war was dressed in his customary double-breasted gray suit. A Stetson hat balanced on the corner of a lawyer's bookcase behind him. An architect's site plan of the Pentagon hung beside windows providing a view of the Capitol. McCloy looked over the man who he had known since his birth. "No need for such nonsense," McCloy said as he stood, extending his hand. A broad smile broke across McCloy's face. "Military life seems to agreeing with you. Mr. Lindbergh misses it so much he's begging to be let back in. Hell will freeze over before that happens. If the country listened to him, Japanese would be the official language on the west coast and German on the east. Surrender would have been the only option with nothing to fight with. Take a seat and keep yourself busy with this," he said, handing a binder to the newly promoted first lieutenant, "while I finish this memo."

Preston sat to the right of his father's friend. A friendship so close McCloy was asked to be Preston's godfather. McCloy in his prior life represented Sterling Swedge and Company on numerous projects. As the American counsel to I.G. Farben, McCloy was instrumental in steering the synthetic rubber and oil deal Herbert Swedge's way.

The office was devoid of the trappings that adorned his Wall Street power center where framed press clippings touting his brokering blockbuster deals were on display to remind clients that the egregious fees they were paying produced profits that paled in comparison. Only the portrait of the current president, not the gallery of international industrial leaders and Wall Street elite, hung on the plaster walls.

Two weeks after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, McCloy held court in Herbert Swedge's walnut lined study. With a tumbler of single malt scotch in hand and a Cuban cigar firmly planted between his teeth, McCloy berated America First, its hero Lindbergh and anyone connected to the two. After the scotch diluted his venom, McCloy strongly suggested to the Princeton senior that he enlist into the Army before being drafted. If he did, a posting to McCloy's Washington staff would be arranged. He needed his own point man, an outsider to the military bureaucracy, someone of superior intellect and ability to understand the entire picture while appreciating the significance of each individual stroke.

Preston's eyes widened with each succeeding paragraph he read. The subject was the relocation of 120,000 Japanese and American citizens of Japanese ancestry living in Oregon, California, and Washington to areas away from the west coast. The centers would be ringed with barbed wire and be patrolled by armed U.S. military personnel.

The Army's chief law enforcement officer, Provost Marshall General Allen Gullion argued for mass evacuation of all Japanese on the west coast. General John DeWitt, the officer in charge of the western defense command didn't support the call for mass evacuation. McCloy was ordered by Stimson to mediate. The debate became moot when President Roosevelt signed executive order 9066 authorizing the forced removal of Japanese American citizens and resident aliens from their homes to areas away from the west coast. McCloy was responsible for the decision since Roosevelt had delegated the matter to him through Stimson.

McCloy put the top on his fountain pen and opened a humidor sitting on his desk. He offered a cigar to Preston who waved it off. Slicing the end off the Cuban Churchill with a silver cutter engraved with his initials, he asked, "What's your opinion?"

"There isn't a shred of evidence that Japanese Americans have participated in any acts of sabotage or intend to do so. May I be direct?"

McCloy waved his cigar to continue. "That's why you're on my staff. Speak your mind."

"General Gullion sees Japanese saboteurs under every rock, and General DeWitt's reputation is one of being an old fool and should be put out to pasture. His position, in reality, is passing the buck. Navy Lt. Commander Kenneth Ringle is for custodial detention, but no mass evacuation and says the entire Japanese problem has been magnified out of proportion. Naval intel seems to be the most credible."

Striking a matchstick against the side of the desk, McCloy brought the cigar to its smoky life. He flipped the match into a glass bowl sitting atop the bookcase behind the desk. "The *Arizona* lying on the bottom of Pearl Harbor is a testimonial to Navy intel," he said between puffs. "The latest Army G-2 assessment suggests Tokyo's espionage net containing Japanese aliens and first and second generation Japanese Americans is organized and working underground."

"Any specifics?" Preston asked.

"Not that I can talk about," McCloy said, fiddling with a paperclip. "There are parallels to Black Tom. Mark my words, the enemy will eventually engage in sabotage."

Preston was well acquainted with "Uncle John's" involvement with the Black Tom case. "The *real* threat, as I see it, comes from Germans and Italians residing in this country," he countered. "How many Nazi sympathizers have been arrested?"

"Scores," McCloy acknowledged as he puffed on the cigar, exhaling a cloud of smoke through his nose. "With the German and Italian populations dispersed around the country, relocation would be impossible even if we wanted to do it."

"And, they look like you and me," Preston quipped. "Without the time to cull these reports, I'm not sure where the Justice Department stands?"

"Deputy Attorney General Rowe is fighting tooth and nail against relocation, says we're targeting one group, that it's racism," McCloy said. "James is a bleeding heart liberal New Dealer always bitching about the Constitution and the rights of the individual."

"The issue could wind up before the Supreme Court." Preston squirmed in his chair. McCloy and his father could always find a detour around the deepest pothole. He steeled himself.

McCloy turned and smashed the cigar into the ashtray. "This issue is putting this former Wall Street lawyer in one helluva box, but if there's even a remote question of the country's safety, the Constitution is just a scrap of paper. I talk to Justice Frankfurter daily. Despite his concerns, he's on board, recognizing the nation's survival trumps the individual."

"Frankfurter is one of nine," Preston said.

"The Court understands there is another way," McCloy paused, staring at Preston. "The writ of Habeus Corpus could be suspended. Military necessity now makes almost anything possible."

Preston recoiled. "Does Roosevelt have the capital to do it?"

McCloy banged the desk with his hand. "Lincoln did it! This is an explosive political issue with California voters scared to death of the possibility of a Japanese invasion."

Even though McCloy said to speak his mind, Preston knew their relationship had its limits. "After the battle of Midway, the Japanese fleet doesn't have the capability to attack Pearl Harbor no less the west coast of the United States. Japanese Americans no longer pose a threat."

McCloy fought to control his temper. "The policy of relocation and internment will stay in place. I've spent more time on this issue than I care to think about. You're going to the coast to move the process to completion. In addition, you will meet with Japanese American leaders and impress on them the need to play ball and not rock the boat with lawsuits that will go to the Supreme Court, or they'll stay behind barbed wire until their ancestral homeland is brought to its knees."

Preston wondered if shouldering an M-1 rifle in a combat assignment would have been worse than being involved in "Uncle John's" machinations. "I assume that Mrs. Higgins has the required paperwork completed in the center drawer of her desk."

"For a Princeton man, you're surprisingly smart," McCloy, an Amherst grad, needled as he leaned back in his chair. "Have a safe and productive trip."

Chapter 21

CALIFORNIA, NOVEMBER 1942

PRESTON DOZED IN THE REAR SEAT of the Chrysler New Yorker. The flight into Los Angeles had been delayed seven hours by a preview of winter in Chicago where heavy sleet grounded all traffic. McCloy, in a briefing before Preston boarded a C-47 at Washington's Andrews Air Force Base, stressed the importance of this trip. The Japanese relocation program was becoming a public relations nightmare. If he had to kick some ass to get the resettlement completed, do so.

"Lieutenant, rise and shine," Sergeant Billy Shawn said, snapping a glance in the rearview mirror. The twenty-five year veteran intended to retire at the end of December 1941 and buy a fishing boat. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor changed his plans. Pulling the short straw among the available drivers in the motor pool, Shaw was assigned the Chrysler to drive the "snot nose" lieutenant from D.C.

Preston squinted into the brilliant warm California sun, catching a sign that read "Welcome to Arcadia." Trying to stretch out in a booth in the airport's bar had proven futile. The twenty-five minute nap gave him a boost of energy. He hadn't missed anything—miles of scrub brush bisected by a two lane highway. Nothing grew in the fields but rabbits.

"Do you play the ponies, lieutenant?" Shawn asked over his shoulder. "Been coming here since they opened in '34. I saw Seabiscuit win his last race here in 1940."

In the distance, the outline of Santa Anita Park racetrack appeared on the horizon. The Chrysler eased off the highway and entered an area marked "RESTRICTED."

“Not my thing,” Preston replied. He opened his leather satchel and rummaged through a pack of papers. They approached the main gate of the thoroughbred track that was considered the jewel of wintertime horse racing in the United States. Manicured azaleas formed a mural of a galloping horse.

An eight foot high chain linked fence topped with barbed wire ringed the entire complex. The Chrysler rolled to a stop at a whitewashed guardhouse. A wood railroad crossing barrier blocked the road. The baby-face that peered into the car was partially obscured by a helmet stenciled with “MP.” Preston rolled down the window and thrust his credentials into the kid’s face. Only a few years younger than the officer in the rear of the staff car, the MP’s eyes widened as he read “Office of the Assistant Secretary of War.” He managed a stammering southern drawl, “Thank you sir, and y’all have a nice day” and raised the gate.

Acquired on March 20 by the Wartime Civil Control Administration, Santa Anita became the largest Japanese American assembly center in the United States. The Chrysler turned left as it cleared the guardhouse, entering a no-man’s land that extended fifty yards to another barbed wire topped fence. Guard towers with .50 caliber machine guns covered the grounds on the four corners of the complex.

“Shawn, stop,” Preston ordered. He stepped out of the car and approached the inner fence. Four hundred temporary barracks had been constructed in the parking lot to house a population averaging four thousand. From his vantage point, milling about was the main activity for the adults. A game of touch football was being played by a group of kids in an alley between the rough sawn buildings. Preston got back into the car and tapped Shawn on the shoulder. “Go.”

Shawn hugged the inside fence, following the barbed wire to a second guardhouse and parked next to a staff car bearing the flag of a Lt. General John DeWitt.

An MP opened the left rear passenger door and stood at attention. Preston grabbed his satchel from the car. “Lieutenant, follow me,” the master sergeant said.

“I want a tour,” Preston said firmly. This MP wasn’t a kid and by the looks of his face, had been in more fights than Preston had credits from Princeton. The .45 automatic added to his no-nonsense air.

As tall as Preston, the MP looked into the young lieutenant's eyes. "General DeWitt is waiting."

"Sergeant Shawn," Preston said, waiting for Shawn to get out of the car. "Take care of my case." He handed Shawn the satchel and proceeded to walk around the guardhouse toward what was once the paddock. It now held barracks like those in the parking lot.

"The General isn't going to be pleased," the MP said.

"I'll handle it," Preston said, crossing between two rows of barracks. Plush grass had been pulverized to raw dirt. Wisps of dust rose with each of his long strides. The MP remained two steps behind. A middle age Japanese woman stood in an open doorway. Despite the conditions, her pink flowered dress was starched and pressed. "How long have you've been here, mam?"

"Since *May*," the woman replied in impeccable English. Bitterness dripped from her every word. "Two days after my daughter graduated from U.C.L.A."

"What did she major in?" Preston asked, trying to lighten the mood.

"Education," the woman replied. "She's over at the center, teaching reading to fourth graders."

"Do you mind?" Preston asked, as he stepped toward the entrance of the makeshift dwelling.

She shook her head no, pointing to Preston's feet. "Your shoes."

Preston looked at the shoes lined up outside all the doors. He slipped off his brogues and stepped inside. The twenty by twenty barrack was home to three families. A woman and two elderly men, who Preston assumed to be grandparents, and a man who appeared to be in his late thirties were reading on their Army manufactured beds. Each resident was given one blanket and one straw tick on arrival, having left any comforts at home except for what they could carry in one suitcase.

The younger man put his book down on the cot and sat up. "How long do you expect to keeps us here? We were supposed to be in permanent housing with private bathrooms and cooking facilities months ago." He pointed to a chamber pot. "How would you feel if your mother had to relieve herself in front of you in the middle of the night?"

One of the elder women said, "You wouldn't allow us to become citizens because we were born in Japan. But my daughter and son-in-law and their

children were born in Los Angeles, and they are forced to live like animals.”

A child with Caucasian features, Preston thought to be three or four, ran to one of the older women and asked for his mother. “She’s at home,” the woman said as he crawled into her lap. Preston didn’t have to ask why the child’s mother wasn’t in the camp—non-Japanese married to Japanese were not permitted to accompany their families. Children of mixed couples were considered Japanese and were relocated without their mothers.

Despite the balmy weather, the barrack was uncomfortable. Small windows provided little ventilation. With perspiration dripping down his back, Preston couldn’t imagine what the conditions were like in the buildings erected on the asphalt parking lot.

“The Nazis used their Nuremberg laws to strip Jews of their citizenship and property and to move them into ghettos,” the man said as he moved his son to his own lap. “Here, my government does the same, but uses the excuse of national security.”

Preston didn’t reply, turned on his heels and walked back into the sunshine to put on his shoes. The MP, standing with his arms crossed, looked amused. “What’s over there?” Preston asked, pointing to a low row of buildings.

“The horse stables,” the MP replied. “The troublemakers are housed there.”

Preston was looking at the rear of the structures. He walked a well beaten path that cut through an opening in the center of the red painted buildings. Preston counted thirty stalls. Half of the rolling doors were open. Toddlers, chased by their older siblings, ran stall to stall. A menu of disparate music coalesced into a cacophony noise. Preston stood in disbelief. The outline of a man resting against the doorway ten stalls away looked familiar. Preston walked toward the compact figure leisurely puffing on a pipe.

“Lieutenant, be careful. That one’s trouble,” the MP warned.

“Tommy Shikiro,” Preston called out. He hadn’t seen the Princeton debating club member and engineering honors student for four years.

Shikiro smiled with his toothy grin. “Preston Swedge or should I say Lieutenant Swedge.” He hopped to attention and gave Preston a comical salute. A plum colored bruise extended from beneath his right eye to the middle of his cheek.

Inching his hand onto the handle of his nightstick, the MP ordered, "Shikiro, have some respect. Lieutenant, he's one of the organizers of several demonstrations we've needed to break up."

Preston turned to the MP. "I want some privacy with Mr. Shikiro."

"I'll wait at the cut through," the MP snorted as he walked away.

"Ben-son," Shikiro yelled in an exaggerated Japanese accent. "Fuck you!"

Preston suppressed a laugh. "Still the same old Tommy." He examined Shikiro's bruised face. "Slip on a bar of soap?"

"Benson and I had a difference of opinion," Shikiro said, relighting his pipe. "Come into my humble abode."

Preston took his place in the doorway. The space intended to house a fourteen hundred pound horse had two beds. Sunshine coming through a barred window spotlighted a vase with a single wilted rose atop an orange crate serving as a night table. A bright yellow dress was hung on a nail. "Wife?"

"Married two years ago," Shikiro said. "Nancy is at the showers. She should be back any minute."

"Cozy," Preston said as he swung at several flies dancing around his head.

"Don't hurt our pets," Shikiro quipped. He moved a book on Constitutional law and sat on one of the beds. "Make yourself comfortable. I'd offer you a cup of coffee, but my kitchen appliances are back in L.A." He re-lit his pipe. "Sent from D.C. to evaluate the Fifth Column threat?"

"Something like that," Preston said. He remained close to the door. "I thought you were in Massachusetts?"

Shikiro sighed. "I was until I married Nancy. Decided to move back to California to be near our families. I got a job at Boeing. That was back in the day when being Japanese American wasn't a liability."

Preston didn't have an encouraging answer. "I'll try to get you out of here."

"Preston, your debating skills were less than mediocre. They haven't improved. Most of the inmates..."

"Residents," Preston interrupted.

"As I said," Shikiro continued, "most of the *inmates* are being shipped north to Manzanar. A prison camp is still a prison camp, but as Benson said,

I'm a troublemaker, and troublemakers are being segregated from the subservient. Nancy and I could be here for the duration."

"I wasn't bullshitting about trying to get you and your wife out," Preston said, extending his hand. "I've got to go."

"The oath of a Princeton man," Shikiro said as he stood and shook hands. "I forgot to ask, how's that piece of shit roommate of yours?"

"That piece of shit is learning to be a pilot," Preston said.

"If there's a god," Shikiro said pensively, "the bastard will fly into the side of a mountain."

Preston laughed. "That would make a lot of Princetonians happy. I'll be seeing you." He walked toward the stone-like Benson standing in the cut through. "If I hear that Shikiro is harmed in anyway, you'll be shoveling shit in Louisiana."

"I don't know what you're talking about Lieutenant," Benson said.

"Take me to DeWitt."

They returned to the guardhouse. Preston retrieved his leather satchel from Shawn and followed Benson through the jockeys' locker room to a flight of steps. "To the left are the offices," Benson said.

"Remember what I said about Shikiro," Preston said. Benson gave him a halfhearted salute then turned on his heels. Preston took the steps two-at-a-time. He entered the camp's administration office where twenty bureaucrats tried to maintain essential services.

A strawberry blonde, Lana Turner look-alike manned the reception desk. Her white sweater could've been painted on. She raised an eyebrow as she looked at the clock. The lieutenant was due by 11:00 a.m. It was approaching 12:30. "If you're Lieutenant Swedge," she said in her best casting couch voice, "go right in."

Preston checked her left hand for a wedding band, but doubted it would make any difference if she did. The brass nameplate still said "Owen Richardson." McCloy hinted that Richardson was making five times the yearly net profit for the time that the track was closed. He rapped twice and entered. "Lieutenant Preston Swedge," he said as he came to attention and saluted.

"You're an hour and a half late," General DeWitt fumed.

A bank of glass overlooked a sea of canvas tents setup on the racing oval. Richardson's desk was moved against the opposite wall to make room for a

conference table and six chairs.

Preston took a chair at the opposite end of the table from DeWitt. The general, long past retirement age, made the introductions. Preston didn't need any. From the files McCoy provided, he recognized Milton Eisenhower, head of the War Relocation Authority and Colonel Karl Bendetsen, who was attached to the staff of Provost Marshal Allen Gullion. Eisenhower bore the striking resemblance to his brother, General Dwight Eisenhower.

The air was thick with cigarette and cigar smoke and burnt coffee. Preston removed a manila folder from his satchel. "Mr. McCloy," he said, passing three identical letters to Eisenhower who in turn passed them to DeWitt and Bendetsen, "wants this place closed down. The fifteen permanent sites were scheduled for completion three months ago."

Eisenhower paled. "In his last trip, Mr. McCloy said he understood the obstacles we face."

Preston placed both hands on the table and leaned forward. "No longer. He's lost his patience."

Chapter 22

NEW YORK, NY AUGUST 1943

PENN STATION WAS WALL-TO-WALL with servicemen waiting for trains. Sleeping bodies formed an obstacle course on the waiting area floor. The railroads' adherence to a timetable had become a joke. As the volume of military people increased, the percentage of trains on schedule decreased in direct proportion. It simply took too long to get the throngs on and off the trains.

For nearly two hours Paul had been waiting with his brother for the train to Chicago where he would change and continue to the state of Washington. On a ten day furlough, the days passed in a blur. Paul hadn't seen his wife and the rest of the family for nine months. He managed to spend a few days alone with Sarah, who had become more and more despondent by his absence. Paul promised that he would try to bring her to his next base if accommodations permitted. Sarah couldn't bear the sight of her husband boarding another train and chose to say her goodbyes at home. Rachel stayed with her daughter-in-law to console her.

"Don't worry about Sarah, she'll be okay in a few days," Jake said. "Ma will get her back to her normal, smiling self. You don't look so chipper either. What's biting you?"

"I'm afraid that I'll wash out of the next phase of training. Dave got me in, but if I stink, there's not a soul who can keep me there. I don't know how to fly anything more sophisticated than a single engine cub," Paul said, moving behind an overflowing garbage bin to get some privacy.

Jake kicked at a candy wrapper on the floor. "What are you worried about? You passed through the elementary and transition schools with top marks. Our problem isn't with you, but with Cohen. I have my doubts about

what he's made of. His indecision drives me crazy." He checked the surroundings for prying eyes. Paul followed Jake's eyes. "You've been looking over your shoulder since we got here. What's *going on*?"

"I'm becoming paranoid. I have the feeling we're being watched. I didn't want to say anything, but it started before the Garden protest."

"I haven't seen anyone who might be tailing us. Too much coffee," Paul joked half-heartedly. "Just because Goodman swung Dave to Langley, doesn't give him free reign. Besides, he doesn't curry favor with the brass by being a Jew. Why don't you stop breaking his balls and give him some credit. He got me into advanced training and managed to get Abramowitz into chief of operations."

Annoyed, Jake waved his hand in the air. "You don't know what I had to do to get him to cut your orders. The guy was afraid he was going to get caught. Maybe he just needs a little more time, but for Christ's sake, it's almost a year that he's been at Langley."

Paul walked to the arrivals board. Nothing had changed in the last hour. "What about Abramowitz? How many times did you want to kill him despite the fact he can smell when something is going to happen? If it weren't for him, I wouldn't be waiting a train to the end of the earth."

Sheldon Abramowitz had picked up a delectable tidbit. A new air force was being created for the Mediterranean Theatre. It would be responsible for strategic bombing from Italy to targets in Poland and surrounding areas. Assembly of new pilots and crews was to commence immediately. The time frame fit perfectly with Paul's graduation from transition flying school. Abramowitz notified Dave, and Paul's orders were completed to transfer to the new Fifteenth Air Force.

Traveling across the breadth of the country was a series of detours to sidings waiting for traffic to pass in the opposite direction. For a kid from Brooklyn, the backwater towns were an eye-opener. Outside of the large cities, the rural population was still battling the Depression and towns were

clamoring for the training grounds that would bring thousands of troops and needed dollars.

Ephrata, Washington was tailor-made for a military base. Land was cheap and plentiful. The location was remote to spies and saboteurs, and for pilots in training, the probability of causing damage to private property was low. The population had hovered around 1,000 in 1941, doubled with the establishment of Ephrata Army Air Field.

The trainman walking car to car boomed, "Ephrata! Ephrata Air Base!"

Paul silently said a prayer of thanks as three days of shaking starts and fits, and waiting on line for malfunctioning toilet facilities was ending. His back and neck ached. His gut began rumbling crossing the Rockies, something he attributed to eating a ham sandwich outside of Denver. Limiting meals to kosher food ended when he reported to basic training in Mississippi and stuck a fork into a plate of pork and beans after not eating for three days. Eating was vital to life, and the *Torah* teachings made dispensations for it, but his digestive track still objected.

He put Richard Tregaskis' *Guadalcanal Diary* into his duffle. The best seller painted a harrowing picture of heroism in the country's first victory on the ground against the Japanese. Unable to concentrate, Paul fought to finish two chapters of his purchase in Chicago.

The train shuddered to a halt. With his duffle bag in hand, Paul waited for a young woman to negotiate the aisle. A battered suitcase twisted in one hand as she held an infant to her chest. Paul had watched her for two hours since she got on at Sprague. With each mile, her beaming smile dissipated. The wedding band told a recurring story of a bride following her officer husband, traveling into the unknown. His stomach churned with each step. Maybe it wasn't the ham sandwich. Washing out of B-17 training would be worse than flunking out of N.Y.U.

Paul stepped onto a platform constructed to receive the ever lengthening troop and supply trains. The old station wasn't more than a lean-to shed that handled the once-a-week three car train from Spokane. Dirt, blowing off unpaved roads, stung his eyes. Preston tasted the brown film on his lips. All that was missing were tumbleweeds he'd seen in the five cent Saturday matinees.

Before the construction of the air base, Ephrata's main street consisted of Lou's All American Bar, Millie's Family Café, and a no-name barbershop

with a red striped pole. The population explosion brought a bowling alley and movie theater.

The woman with the baby stood alone fifty feet from the platform, using her cardigan sweater as a shield against the wind. A Jeep approached. Running a hand through her hair, she found her smile. The Jeep passed, stopping at the far end of the platform. She returned to her suitcase.

Two and a half ton trucks backed up to the train's cargo containers as a contingent of black enlisted men scrambled to unload supplies for the base. Paul slung the duffle over his shoulder and took a set of wood plank stairs to the street. Unlike former postings where he arrived with other trainees, this time Paul was responsible for arranging his own transportation. The prospect of walking three miles held little appeal. Reporting to the command post on arrival, where billeting arrangements and group assignments would be found, was standard procedure.

A solitary deuce and a half, outfitted with benches in the cargo area, was parked at the end of the platform. Paul closed the distance. A staff sergeant, wearing flight overalls, rested against the rear tailgate as a dozen men loaded their gear and took seats.

Bent over in a fit of laughter, the sergeant snapped to attention. "Any chance you can tell me where I can get a lift to the CP?" Paul asked.

"That be me," the sergeant said, adjusting his cap. "Hey one of you mugs," he called to the guys already seated, "take the lieutenant's bag. Lieutenant, you can ride upfront."

"Cochrane, take it easy on the way back. I don't want to spend the war in a hospital recuperating from a broken back like Davis," one of the enlisted men called out.

The five-five Cochrane spit into the dirt, wiping his hands on his flight overalls. "He shouldn't have been standing."

Paul climbed into the cab. The sergeant depressed the clutch and turned the key. After a few choice muted curses and grinding gears, the behemoth moved off. A cloud of dirt trailed the truck as it made its way along three miles of unpaved road. "You cut it close with school starting tomorrow," Cochrane said with a wink.

A squadron of B-17s approached a runway running parallel to the road. Their landing gears were down. "That's right sergeant. It starts tomorrow," Paul said.

“Your competition got in two days ago. The colonel remembers the brown-nosers who get in early and the stragglers who get in at the end,” Cochrane said. “Pilots who end up as navigators and bombardiers ask themselves why me?”

“I bet it’s because they cut it close,” Paul answered.

“That’s the first choice, but wrong,” Cochrane said, looking at Paul. “It’s because they fly like shit.”

Paul laughed. Cochrane took great pleasure in using the same routine with all the rookies. The truck caught a deep rut, dragging it toward a culvert on that side of the road. Cochrane fought to bring the truck back to the center of the road as unhappy passengers in the rear beat on the roof of the cab.

“Sergeant, did you learn how to drive in the army?” Paul asked as he held onto the seat.

Cochrane ground the gears as he shifted. “I’m a gunner on a Seventeen. Just doing the guys a favor by giving them a lift.” He was having fun rocking the truck side to side.

The lead B-17 decelerated over the runway, touched the asphalt with its wheels, then powered up and climbed. “They’re practicing touch and go,” Cochrane said. “Looks like fun, but nothings done for nothing. A pilot could save his crew and ship if he learns it right.”

“Amazing machines,” Paul said in awe of the B-17. The Flying Fortress was the next generation heavy bomber that replaced the B-24 Liberator as the main air weapon against Nazi Germany. A B-17 carried a crew of ten, 14 machine guns, 6,000 pounds of bombs, and enough fuel for a maximum range of 2,880 miles.

“You’re pretty...” The roar of the massive four engines powering the B-17s drowned out Cochrane as they flew over the truck.

“Didn’t catch what you were saying,” Paul yelled over the continuing roar.

The last plane in the group passed. “I said you guys are lucky being allowed to fly the prettiest girls in the air,” Cochrane yelled.

The squadron circled the base and prepared to repeat the exercise. Cochrane blew the horn three times as he approached the base’s main gate. Stepping out of a guardhouse, an MP waved the truck through. Cochrane

smashed the accelerator, passed the command post, making a hard left turn. Catcalls from the rear of the truck brought a grin to his face.

Cochrane slammed on the breaks as they drew even with the mess hall. He yelled out of the window, "End of the line. Tips would be appreciated."

A chorus of "Fuck you and your mother" was returned. Cochrane waited for the customary rap on the tailgate to signal everyone was off. He made a series of right turns between the clapboard barracks and returned to the command center. Sticking out his hand, he said, "Sorry I won't be around to see you get a ship. My group is getting ready to shove off to England."

Paul shook hands. "Take care of yourself." He wondered what was in store for the happy-go-lucky sergeant. The air campaign based out of England was at a critical point. Losses were so high that the average life span of a B-17 and crew was fifty-five days. If one did the math, only an ominous conclusion could be extrapolated—every 180 days the entire Eighth Air Force would need to be replaced if the losses continued.

Paul stepped down from the truck. Cochrane honked the horn and drove away, spewing a cloud of dirt. Paul looked down at his black service brogues which bore little resemblance to the spitshine applied in Chicago. He wiped them off with the back of his pant leg and left his duffle outside of the command center door.

He straightened his tie. With his hand on the doorknob, Paul took a deep breath and entered to find the back of an enlisted man hunched over a typewriter. The barebones office consisted of one G.I. standard issue metal desk, a bank of file cabinets, two black phones, and a wood bench. "Lieutenant Paul Rothstein. I'd like to see the base commander." The more than ample figure didn't answer. "It's customary to stand and salute an officer!"

"Hold your fucking shirt on! Can't you see I'm busy?"

Paul didn't have to see the man's face—Vinnie Sapienza. "I don't believe it."

Vinnie moved around the desk to deliver a bear hug. "I'm glad to see another human being that speaks the same language. Take a seat, Colonel Thompson is exchanging pleasantries with one of the pilots."

It wasn't difficult to catch the tenor of the conversation taking place in the colonel's office. A paper-thin wall separating the commander from the outside world was like a shade on an open window. "I don't give a good

God damn. You're in the God damn army, not fucking Princeton. Get your papers from the sergeant and get the hell off this base."

"Colonel, I..."

"Now," Thompson ordered.

Paul did a double take as Clark Johnson came through the door. Paul expected to see dejection, but instead, the America First front man was grinning as though he had just won a date with Betty Grable. Vinnie held up an envelope between two of his sausage size fingers.

"Thank you sergeant," Johnson said as he snatched the envelope. Still ruddy-faced but twenty pounds thinner, he glanced at Paul for a second. "Do me a favor and call me a cab." He let out a belly laugh as he flipped the door closed with his shoe.

The wall shook with Thompson slamming his door closed. Paul didn't let on that he recognized Johnson. "Pretty happy for a guy who just got chewed out."

Sapienza plopped down in a chair behind the battered desk. "That guy has been nothing but a pain in the ass since he got here, bitching and moaning that he was born to be a fighter jockey not a bomber pilot. Christmas came early, he got his wish."

Paul raised an eyebrow, knowing that it took heavyweight pull to get a transfer. He changed the subject. "When did they get the idea of hiring a gorilla to do the paperwork? And they say that the army is not creative," Paul cracked. "How in the world did you end up in this place?"

Vinnie looked surprised. "I thought you knew I was in. I guess your brother kept it a secret. I got into a little jam and was given a choice, jail or this. I chose the latter, and told Jake that I wasn't going to be around for a couple of deals that were on the fire. It was your brother who fixed it up."

"And who fixed this up?" Paul asked.

Vinnie leaned back in the chair and put his boots on the desk. "A few bucks in the right place do a lot of good. Six months ago, when an opening came up for clerk, a guy boosted me for it. I hit it off with the old man, got my stripes and the rest is history."

Paul sat down on the bench opposite Sapienza. "I heard this base was a shithole, but it exceeds the warning."

"If you think this is bad now, you should've seen it when I got here. There were no barracks, just tents. We had more guys than we had space."

The weather goes from broiling in the summer to arctic in the winter. When it's not raining, the dust is blowing. The line mechanics have one fucking time maintaining the planes. That's the idea, give us as much trouble as possible in training, and maybe when the real thing comes along we will be ready."

"What do you mean we?" Paul asked. "I thought you'd be staying here for the entire war?"

"Listen Mr. Joe College, just because I was once connected to a bunch of unsavory types don't make me a wimp no-fight-Quaker," Vinnie said indignantly. "I want to kill those Nazi bastards as much as you do. As long as we are on the subject of Nazi bastards, how is your wife's cousin, that crazy German broad Minnah?"

"Jake didn't forget to tell you that I was married. Minnah hasn't gotten over the loss of her family. It's a sure bet they're dead."

Vinnie straightened papers in a file box on the desk. "As an officer you can bring your wife out here if you want, but finding a place to stay is the big problem. The local hotel only has forty rooms and at times has people sleeping on the floor. I'll check things out and see what can be done."

Paul thought of the woman with the baby sitting on her suitcase. "Sarah and I discussed her coming out, but we decided it would be wiser for her to remain in New York." He motioned toward the colonel's office with his thumb. "What about the colonel?"

Vinnie pulled himself to his feet. "I'll get you back here when he's cooled off. I have a bunk reserved in your name. Come on, I'll get you situated."

Chapter 23

WASHINGTON, DC JANUARY 1944

PRESTON HIT THE BUTTON ON THE ALARM CLOCK, rolled off the white sweated knockout from the office at Santa Anita Park, and sat on the edge of the bed. He reached for the lamp on the night table. The Westclock read 4:30. Bette Warnock pulled the sheet over her ample breasts. “Do you really think you can?” she asked in her smoky voice.

Bette was part of his west coast routine—tour the relocation camps and take some rest and relaxation with the Hollywood hopeful. “Absolutely,” Preston said as he put on his shorts. “I’ll get things arranged for a screen test at Twentieth Century.” Whispering sweet-somethings of his father’s Tinseltown contacts oiled the path to room 612 in the Los Angeles Ambassador Hotel.

“When will you be back, Captain Swedge?”

Preston adjusted the silver bars on his shirt collar. Promotion to captain came with a price in John McCloy’s world where Marine island hopping in the Pacific, the Eighth Air Forces horrific losses over Germany, and the battle for North Africa never pushed Japanese-American relocation off his desk. Relocation was Preston’s baby. “Probably next week. I’ve got to be going.”

“I’ll be waiting,” she said, closing her eyes.

Preston took a final glance at Bette. She was like the other dreamers, they were always waiting.



Preston massaged the kink in his neck after five hours behind the wheel of the 1940 Ford coupe. Two hundred miles on U.S. Highway 395 didn't seem to go on forever when Sgt. Billy Shawn was driving. With this leg of the trip off the record, Preston rented a car, leaving the loquacious G.I. at the motor pool. Easing off the accelerator of the flathead V8, he checked the speedometer, slowing to 25 mph as he entered the town of Pine Valley at the foot of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Turning west off 395 onto a narrow country lane, Preston weaved around a series of foot deep ruts. Signs posted on both sides of the road cautioned the area ahead was "Restricted." Manzanar Relocation Center was one of fifteen permanent bases in California, Utah, Idaho, Arizona, Colorado, and Arkansas segregating Japanese-Americans.

In Spanish, Manzanar means apple orchard. The area called Owens Valley, once green with orchards and alfalfa fields, turned into an inhabitable desert when water was diverted south to Los Angeles in the 1920s. Six thousand acres became home to ten thousand inmates.

Preston cleared through the security outpost and headed for Manzanar's developed central portion, covering an area, approximately five-hundred and forty acres, where eight watchtowers with machine guns and a five-strand barbed wire fence kept the Japanese in and the hostile local population out.

Preston parked the coupe, buttoned his topcoat and put on his fleece lined leather gloves. He forced the door open against a vicious wind. Despite a bright morning sun, the wind made twenty degrees feel like zero. Three inches of fresh snow crunched under his feet as he made his way to the main administration building. The sky over the camp was punctuated with plumes of gray smoke rising from tin chimneys affixed to barracks roofs. Oil burning stoves were the only source of warmth for the residents of "permanent" housing constructed of quarter-inch boards and tar paper nailed to the roof and walls with batten boards.

Preston knocked the snow off his shoes against the railing of the three step landing. His unexpected appearance snapped the heads of the clerical staff. "Captain Swedge," a matronly clerk said, confused. "Mr. Merritt isn't on the post. He's due back in an hour." Ralph P. Merritt was the fifth civilian director of the camp under the War Relocation Authority.

Preston placed his hands on a wood rail that divided visitors from staff. He produced an *I don't give a damn smile*. "Thomas Shikiro. Where can I find him?"

The clerk trundled to a wall of file cabinets. "Chikiro. First name Thomas," she said, thumbing through 3x5 cards. "I don't have a Thomas Chikiro."

"Shikiro. S-H-I-K-I-R-O," Preston fumed. "He came in three weeks ago."

"My mistake. I thought the last name begins with a C." She moved to the end of the alphabet. "Here it is. Block thirty-six, building A. Check the block's kitchen, Mr. Shikiro is working as a cook. I'll call for an escort."

"Not necessary. I need a Jeep," Preston replied.

"There are four parked behind the building," she said. "Take your pick of the litter."

Preston turned on his heels and proceeded down a short hall to a rear exit. He chose the lone Jeep with a canvass top. After three cranks, the Willy's belched to life. Preston managed to get the transmission into first gear.

Oiled roads divided the central portion of the relocation center into sixty-seven blocks, including thirty-six residential blocks, two staff housing blocks, an administrative block, two warehouse blocks, a garage block, and a hospital block.

Preston drove north, avoiding faces behind single pane windows. Each barrack was divided into six, sixteen by twenty feet units. With six to eight people assigned to a unit, the population per block averaged two hundred fifty.

The Jeep weaved between trucks in the industrial center. Male and female workers were loading goods produced in the garment, cabinet, and mattress factories for the camp's consumption.

Preston pulled parallel to building A of block 36. Two elderly males, braving the wind, ceased their conversation at the sight of the officer without an MP guard. "Where's the kitchen?" Preston asked.

Without replying the inmates continued walking. Preston learned a few words of Japanese, the one that he caught wasn't complimentary— *Gaijin*. He circled the block, finding a collection of garbage cans in an alley. Preston parked the Jeep.

Two young females wearing white aprons disappeared from an open door with Preston's approach. The air was thick with the smell of boiling fish and cabbage. He cupped his gloves around his nose, took a deep breath and stepped inside.

Each block had its own kitchen and commissary. Oil drum size pots boiled on a commercial ten burner stove producing a haze at the ceiling. "Let's go people," Tommy Shikiro said, clapping his hands twice. A crew of ten picked up the pace. Piles of peeled carrots, onions, and potatoes were on two wood tables. Twenty chickens lay boned and quartered. "We've got two-hundred fifty for lunch." He picked up a large ladle, moving toward the stove.

"Tommy, we have company," one of the young females said, pointing to the door.

Tommy slowly turned, a broad smile crossed his face. "Captain Swedge."

Preston was alarmed by Tommy's appearance. Coal black hair, scraggly and tussled, hadn't been washed or combed in days. The Princeton grad had forsaken his clean shaven ways for a Fu Manchu mustache. "Any place we can talk?" Preston asked. He removed his gloves and unbuttoned his coat. In contrast to the outside, the kitchen was stifling hot.

Tommy finished stirring a fish stew, put down the ladle, and wiped his hands on his apron already streaked with blood and oil. "Come on," he said, motioning to an open interior door. With a distinct limp of his left foot, Tommy led the way to a storeroom.

Preston followed. "Make yourself comfortable," Tommy said, taking a seat on a sack of flour. "Captain. Congratulations are in order."

Preston sheepishly smiled. "I'm glad you're out of Santa Anita."

"Yeah, I wouldn't have wanted to spend the winter months in balmy southern California." Tommy removed his pipe from his pant pocket. He struck a wood match and pulled deeply on the pipe. "I would have sent a thank you note, but I didn't think it would have looked too good at War Department."

"I didn't know you cook," Preston said, wiping dust off a rickety stool.

"I don't, but I also don't sew or do wood working. I had the opportunity to work in the infirmary, but emptying bedpans didn't appeal to me." He tamped the smoldering tobacco with his finger. "Do you know we have our own orphanage?"

Preston didn't answer. Tommy continued, "All Nisei orphans in the restricted zone, even half-Japanese babies living in Caucasian foster homes, are sent here. Uncle Sam can't be too careful—you never know when a toddler might turn out to be a spy or a saboteur. What brings you here, Captain Swedge?"

"I want to offer a way out of here," Preston said.

"A position with Sterling Swedge. Hot dig-it-tee! I'll pack my things and kiss my wife goodbye," Tommy said with a sneer.

"I couldn't get that," Preston laughed. "An all Nisei regiment is being formed. Volunteer and see the world."

Tommy struck another match, working another cloud of smoke from the pipe. "You're a few steps behind. We had a recruiter here a couple of days ago. I've seen the loyalty oath."

"It's a formality," Preston weakly protested.

"Did you have to sign a loyalty oath?" Tommy charged. "Being a member of America First isn't my idea of a patriotic American. The world was going up in smoke as you and that shitbag Clark Johnson protested."

"Take the time to reconsider," Preston counseled.

Tommy pushed off the flour sack, signaling the meeting was over. "Maybe you will honor the block by staying for lunch. I have karei—boiled flat fish simmered in a soy sauce based soup and horenso ohitashi—Japanese-style spinach salad."



Preston took in the view from Assistant Secretary John McCloy's fifth floor office in the newly constructed Pentagon. Across the Potomac, the Washington Monument glistened against a cloudless sky.

The expansive suite was divided into three sections: his personal workspace featuring a desk constructed from teak salvaged from the deck of the sunken battleship Arizona; a conference area able to accommodate twelve, and the "setup room," an ensemble of four brown leather winged back chairs surrounding a claw foot shin high table where McCloy could

pick a visitor's pocket without being detected. The table was originally owned by Edwin Stanton, Abraham Lincoln's secretary of war.

"I'm still getting used to having all members of the department in one place," McCloy said.

Ground for the new home of the War Department was broken on September 11, 1941, with construction completed in approximately sixteen months at a cost of \$83 million. Its unusual shape resulted from the fact that its originally intended site, Arlington Farms, fronted on Arlington Ridge Road and the Arlington Memorial Bridge approach, which intersected at an angle of approximately 108 degrees, the angle of a regular pentagon.

McCloy lifted the lid on his cigar humidor, retrieved a Cuban delight, and offered one to Preston. "I'll pass. My throat is not A-1. Picked up a bug in Hawaii." He went through a coughing spree.

"The original location was better, but Roosevelt didn't want the view of the city obstructed from Arlington Cemetery." McCloy lit the stogie and walked to the windows. The immense building was built in a series of concentric circles. "From your reports, things have reached equilibrium out west."

Preston rasped, "Dillon Myer has done a great job of finalizing the fifteen camps." Myer oversaw the completion of relocation centers in California, Utah, Idaho, Arizona, Colorado, and Arkansas after replacing Milton Eisenhower. "A hundred thousand Japanese-Americans are under guard."

"Where do we stand with the formation of the Nisei Voluntary Regiment?" McCloy asked, exhaling a balloon size cloud of smoke. Worried about cases coming before the Supreme Court, McCloy envisioned forming a regiment totally manned by Japanese-Americans as proof of the government's good faith efforts to display the loyalty of those interned, and hence their internment was not grounded by racial prejudice.

Preston fought back a sneeze. "Not on firm ground." He removed a handkerchief from his dress jacket and wiped his nose. "There isn't a groundswell rushing to signup. The loyalty oath and the disavowal of any allegiance to the emperor of Japan is insulting to many, and there's a rumor going around the camps that those joining will be used in suicide missions." He braced himself for McCloy's response.

"Bullshit, one hundred percent." McCloy returned to his chair. "It's been designated the Four-Four-Two Regiment. It *will* be staffed."

“Less than a thousand have volunteered from a target number of three thousand,” Preston said between wipes of his nose. “Two thousand Nisei in Hawaii will be more than willing to join, but General Dewitt isn’t on board.”

“Dewitt wouldn’t trust his grandmother if she put her eyeliner on a slant,” McCloy grunted. “The Four-Four-Two isn’t going to the Pacific. They’ll be going to Italy.”

The intercom buzzed. “Mr. Meiklejohn is here,” Mrs. Higgins said.

Alexander Meiklejohn was the former president of Amherst College and longtime acquaintance of McCloy. Meiklejohn in his position with the American Civil Liberties Union was a monitor of government policy concerning Japanese Americans. “Send him in. Florence, be a love and scurry up a pot of coffee,” McCloy said.

At seventy-one, Meiklejohn smashed across the threshold with his bowler hat, silver tipped walking stick in hand, and a black wool topcoat draped over his arm. His high forehead rose to a brownish gray splash of hair parted down the middle. Gold wire rim glasses perched on a nose that accentuated his gaunt face.

McCloy met Meiklejohn in the middle of the office. “Dean Meiklejohn,” McCloy said deferentially. “What a pleasant surprise.” He led his visitor to the “setup room.” McCloy wasn’t surprised by Meiklejohn’s call, requesting an appointment—military intelligence reported Meiklejohn’s appearance in the city the day before. The ACLU was on the subversive watch list. “Come sit.”

McCloy made the introductions. “I attended your lecture at Princeton during my sophomore year,” Preston said. “One of my fondest college memories.”

Meiklejohn placed his hat and coat on one of the chairs, taking the adjacent seat. McCloy took the opposing chair. Preston stood. “November, 1939,” Meiklejohn said without hesitation. A champion of free speech and civil liberties, his address covered the necessity of open discourse in a free and democratic society, no matter how offensive and controversial. Meiklejohn added fuel to the fire for Clark Johnson and the debating club demands for a say in booking campus speakers.

Florence Higgins carried in a carafe of coffee and a tray of doughnuts, putting them on the Stanton table. “Captain Swedge, a cup of tea might be

better for your throat.”

Florence Higgins was military through and through. Her father fought at Gettysburg, losing a leg on Little Round Top with the Twentieth Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment. Her lawyer husband was serving in the Pacific Theatre on the staff of General MacArthur. The sixty-four year old keeper of the flame had let Preston use a bedroom in her Georgetown home while he looked for an apartment in the over-rented city.

“Not necessary,” Preston said, trying not to look uncomfortable. There was the issue of daughter Margaret. Three years younger than the dashing Princeton man, Peggy had fallen head over heels and into his bed. Florence wasn’t buying his incessant traveling as an excuse for avoiding her daughter.

McCloy eyed Preston who wasn’t the first officer Florence Higgins tried to fix up with her daughter. “Thank you Mrs. Higgins.” He waited for her to exit. “What brings you across the river?”

“ACLU representatives in California tell me your people are working on a plan to furlough Nisei,” Meiklejohn said. “They feel the conditions are as unconstitutional as the relocations.”

Preston poured three cups of coffee, handing a cup and saucer to Meiklejohn and McCloy. He took his own cup and walked toward the windows, giving McCloy room to operate.

“As luck would have it, Captain Swedge has just returned from the coast where he’s been working on the very program your representatives are concerned about,” McCloy said. “Nothing is set in stone. We want to be fair to those interned.”

“I’ve heard snippets,” Meiklejohn said. “Perhaps if I have the entire picture, the organization’s fears can be allayed.”

McCloy cleared his throat. “Captain...”

Preston put his cup and saucer on the window ledge. “Three kinds of passes will be issued: short-term emergency passes; restricted passes for work gangs to be employed outside of the camps; and indefinite furloughs.”

Meiklejohn dropped three cubes of sugar into his cup. “What are the conditions for the indefinite furloughs?” He stirred the coffee and tapped the saucer twice with his spoon.

“References will need to be obtained, preferably from Caucasians, and each internee will be asked to sign a pledge of allegiance to the United

States and agree to serve as an informant regarding any subversive activity, both in the relocation camps and in the communities they will resettle,” Preston paused to blow his nose. “In addition, they will be instructed to stay away from large groups of Japanese and to develop American habits that will help them to be accepted into American society. Finally, those wanting out of the camps will be asked to furnish proof that they have always been loyal to the United States.”

Meiklejohn finished his coffee. McCloy and Preston waited for his reaction. The silence was broken by a teletype machine behind McCloy’s desk spitting out paper tape. The machine, linked to bases around the world, kept the Assistant Secretary of War on top of breaking events.

Meiklejohn wiped his lips with a silk handkerchief. “Although the conditions placed on furloughs are extensive, they are, I think, essentially reasonable limits arising out of the evacuation situation. I will recommend to the board and the national committee not to mount a direct constitutional challenge.”

McCloy wanted to clap his hands and jump for joy. “These are difficult times for everyone.”

“I appreciate your predicament, John,” Meiklejohn said, gathering his things. “Next time I’m in town, we need to get together to talk about the days of yore.”

Preston escorted Meiklejohn through the outer office to return to find McCloy at the teletype machine. “Son of a bitch!” McCloy exclaimed. “There’s been a riot at Manzanar— two dead, eight wounded. Read it!”

Preston took the printout with trepidation. Since his last stop at Manzanar, the atmosphere of passive resistance had changed to outright defiance. Demonstrations that ended in battles with MPs brought Washington’s permission to engage in deadly force if warnings to disperse went unheeded. He didn’t know the name Heideki Nikajima, but Tommy Shikiro jumped off the yellow grained paper.

Chapter 24

WESTFIELD, NJ SEPTEMBER 2000

JOE SHOVED SIX EMPTY BUDWEISER cans across the dinette table. The air hung heavy with the remains of a pack of Marlboros floating in his morning coffee. He closed the second installment of the Swedge diaries, giving the leather cover a tap with his knuckles. Under the table, Roxy placed her head in his lap. “The old guy was one calculating, cold-hearted bastard,” he said, scratching Roxy behind her ears. “I’m sure of one thing—Paul Rothstein was the main character in his nightmare.”

Roxy cocked her head to the side, yawned and rolled onto her back. *Geopolitical Systems* was long over. He’d push the decision back another day whether to stick it out or put his tail between his legs and slink away. Joe searched his wallet for Dr. Headcase’s card. A picture of his grandfather wagging his finger came up in the shuffle. “Screw you.” He turned the picture face down. “Every family has its designated fuck up.”

Washing the sewer taste out of his mouth with a swig from a bottle of mouth-wash kept in the cabinet housing the glasses, Joe spit into the sink. He didn’t know if a dead Preston Swedge was worse than the live one who had burned his ass for twenty years. Preston was a follower. Joe was convinced that if Herbert Swedge didn’t have a boatload of money, his son would have fallen in with hoods and other low-lives of the Depression. Preston resisted the bile of his roommate Clark Johnson, but succumbed to the power and trappings of the office of John McCloy. Some men are born bad to the bone, others grow into the role. If Preston could participate in the imprisonment of American citizens based solely on their race and assist in keeping them segregated until the end of the war, what else was he involved

with? He had questions on top of questions. And where did Jake Rothstein fit in?

Through the window over the sink, Joe watched Roxy romp in a light drizzle. *Why should I give a damn about what Preston Swedge was up to?* “You’re a cop, stupid! Act like one!” he screamed at the four walls. Donations to the Westfield temple combined with Rabbi Balaban chanting the mourner’s prayer for the dead over Preston’s grave led him to phone the temple and hit his first roadblock— Balaban was in Israel and wouldn’t be back for three months.

Joe pondered contacting Reverend James Miller. According to Ed Stoval, two days after officiating at Preston’s funeral, the reverend had a grapefruit size tumor removed from his colon. The septuagenarian was in re-hab trying to get back on his feet. “What the hell do I have to lose?” he said, punching in the number for the First Presbyterian Church. The secretary said Miller was up for company and would appreciate any respite from the boredom. She gave Joe an inside tip—the reverend had a sweet tooth.

Stopping at Bremmer’s Candy Emporium in the business district, Joe picked a box of mixed chocolates and headed for the other side of town where the OptimaCare Nursing and Rehabilitation Center abutted the southwest corner of Nomahegan Park. Joe was part of the police detail at the zoning board meetings when conservationists and left-wing liberal-weenies pulled a sit down demonstration in opposition to the “big business” construction application. Driving by the facility always brought a smile, remembering the astonished faces of the committee when one of the more amply endowed female members of Preserve Our Park decided to nurse her infant in the first row.

Shielded from the road by towering oaks and a phalanx of blue spruce, the large pane glass, rough timbers and a whitewashed stucco façade gave the impression of a mountain resort. Joe followed the arrows to visitors parking, yielding to an exiting hearse from Kerrigan’s Funeral Home. The road, barely two cars wide, forced the two drivers to slow to a crawl. Recognizing Joe, Bud Kerrigan stopped the Cadillac. “When are you coming back to the Downtown Association?” Kerrigan asked. “The meetings haven’t been the same.”

The Downtown Association was a collection of local merchants who met once a month. Joe, an unofficial member, served as the police

representative. He and the mortician shared dirty jokes, beer, and general disdain for the association's self-importance and parliamentary rules. "I'm working on it," Joe said. "Who's the guest speaker?"

Kerrigan scratched the stubble on his chin. "An attorney named... Hardon. No, Hargrove," he said with a booming laugh. "All attorneys are hardons."

Joe had to laugh. "Never heard of him, but I'd lay even money he's a prick. Might just see you there tomorrow." He watched the hearse pull away in the Volvo's side mirror. The more he thought about the meeting, the more he was inclined to go. In addition to Preston's attorney being present, there were a number of members who might be able to shed some light on Preston's past.

Visitor's parking was jammed. Joe parked fifty feet from the main entrance in a no parking-fire zone. Putting his Westfield P.D. credentials on the dash, he took the five-iron and candy from the front seat. The drizzle turned to a steady rain. Joe fished a hooded windbreaker nestled behind the spare tire he never bothered to return to its well beneath the carpet. The temperature had dropped into the low fifties. It felt like fall.

Joe hesitated at the main entrance. Hospitals caused him to sweat, nursing homes made him queasy. The sight of his grandfather, swathed in a diaper and tethered to multiple I.V. lines was burned into his brain. He unconsciously took a deep breath, preparing himself for the smell of urine and the creeping death that overwhelmed him in Brooklyn's All Saints Nursing.

Limping into the reception area drew a concerned look from the matronly woman manning the desk. "Re-hab is down the hall," she said, moving around the counter. "Have a seat. I'll get you a wheelchair."

Plush arm chairs were grouped among towering palms and thriving rubber plants. "A patient named James Miller. Where would I find him?" Joe said, wiping water off his head with a tissue retrieved from a box on the desk.

"I'm sorry I mistook..." she said, scurrying back to her station.

"Not a problem," Joe said with a wave of the box of candy. "My good buddy is waiting for his fix."

Checking her computer, she said, "He's in the recreation center. End of the hall, take a left." She handed Joe a visitor badge to hang around his

neck.

Soft indirect lighting reflected off fuchsia walls and matching Italian marble floor in the main corridor. Joe sniffed the air—nothing but the hint of lilac. Only the sound of the club clacking with each step broke an eerie silence.

Turning left at the end of the corridor brought the glass domed rec center into view. A nurse's aide pushed a wheelchair carting a young male Joe judged to be no more than twenty-five, his face contorted in a Halloween mask with a metal neck brace keeping a skull marked with a scar running ear to ear in a fixed position. Joe forced his back against the wall. The kid looked familiar.

Joe, itching for a cigarette, reached into his pocket for a stray piece of gum. For a second, he thought of back pedaling before hitting a metal button marked "Automatic Entry."

Double-wide glass panel doors opened. Joe stood under the dome amazed at the theater size of the solarium, comparing it to the twenty by twenty dingy "family room" in the place his insurance company approved for rehabbing his leg. Tropical flowers in huge terracotta urns marked the periphery. Muted violins played through fist size speakers. Outside the walls of glass, a pond added to the idyllic feeling.

Four women in the midst of a spirited card game broke the tranquility with a series of whoops and slaps to the green felt covered table. A pair of pre-school girls skipped and squealed around an elderly gentleman as their mother pleaded for quiet. Joe scanned the twelve other occupants. James Miller was alone at a table for two.

An array of thank you cards was splayed before the scary thin reverend. Miller, wearing a blue sweat suit, peered over his half-frame glasses as Joe approached. "Good afternoon," Miller said, trying to place Joe's face. "Have we met?"

"Not directly," Joe replied.

Miller snapped his fingers three times in quick succession. "The cemetery. I didn't think anyone remembered Isabel Grabar. Nice of you to put flowers on her grave."

Caught off guard, Joe stammered, "A fine woman. I don't visit as often as I should."

“Isabel Grabar was the first funeral I officiated. That was in 1949 in a little town outside of Memphis Tennessee,” Miller growled. The scowl on his face accentuated the gaunt lines. “What game are you playing?”

“I knew Preston for twenty years. With the arrangements being private, I decided to stay out of the way.” Joe stuck his detective badge under Miller’s nose. “Joe Henderson.”

Miller put down his pen. “Something amiss?” The look of concern replaced his scowl.

“This is a private matter,” Joe said, holding the box of candy in plain view.

“My boy, might there be some chocolate delights in that cardboard conveyance?” Miller asked. The wrapping paper was a dead give away. “You’re the...”

“Hero cop,” Joe interrupted with a forced smile. “I heard you’re addicted.”

Miller’s eyes twinkled as he opened the pound box, bringing the contents close to his nose. “Only my secretary knows.” He chose a cherry filled chocolate drop. “Have a seat. You look as though you could take a turn in this place.”

“Been there and done that,” Joe said, pulling out a chair. A demure blonde in hospital togs sashayed into the room. “This is a far cry from the dump I was incarcerated for my re-hab.”

“*These* nurses might look sweet, but under those smiles, live a collection of tyrants. They’re working me to death,” Miller said, savoring another piece.

Joe watched the nurse wheel one of the patients to the door. “I’ll only take a few minutes of your time.”

“They’ll be coming for me for my afternoon workout,” Miller said. “What’s on your mind?”

“Preston lived an interesting life.”

“Interesting but conflicted,” Miller said, checking through the box. “When Preston was a young man, he could be rough. There was an element in town that was against many things, and he fell in with them. People change. He re-discovered God.”

The rain intensified, pounding the glass roof. “He must’ve had one heck of a re-discovery to have Rabbi Balaban say *Kaddish* for him,” Joe said,

staring at Miller who suddenly looked uncomfortable.

"You'll have to take that up with Bernard," Miller replied, pushing the box across the table. "Have a piece."

"I'll ask him when he returns from Israel," Joe said, picking an orange truffle. "I understand you and the Swedges arrived in town around the same time and became pretty tight."

"Lieutenant," Miller said with a renewed irritation, "I've got to get these cards done. My relationship was personal."

Joe reached into his jacket, removing the girl's picture found among the scrum at the estate sale. "Do you recognize her?"

Miller paled, taking the battered photo, holding it like it was a hand grenade with the pin removed. "Where did you find this?" He turned the photo over, running his fingers around the edges before gently touching the girl's face.

"In Preston's basement," Joe said, studying Miller's face.

"Preston held it to his heart when he was ill, not letting go for days." Miller said. "I'm surprised it survived."

"Looks like the picture has been through a war," Joe said.

"Preston's recovery was long and painful. He was fighting his own private war."

"I heard about his crackup. She have a name?"

"It's been many years." Miller stared at the face. "Rachel. No, No... Rebecca. Yes, Rebecca. Poor thing was so young."

Joe leaned on the five-iron. "What happened to her?"

Without emotion, Miller said, "Hit by a car. Lingered for a couple of days before the good Lord took her home. She was just seven years old."

"Queens beat Jacks!" roared from the card game.

"I look at the picture, and I say to myself, who does she look like?" Joe said, fighting the urge to stick a Marlboro into his mouth. "Rebecca doesn't look like Millie or Preston." He handed Miller the photo of the Swedges on vacation. "Wouldn't ever have guessed she was their child."

Miller glanced at both photos. "Rebecca was four when she was adopted." He handed the photos back to Joe. "Her father was killed on one of the islands in the Pacific during the war. When Preston's cousin died in a car accident, she was left an orphan."

Joe sensed there was more to the story. “No other pictures, nothing of her ever being in their lives, nor did I see a grave marker with her name at Fairview. Like it was boom and she was gone.”

“Millie, may she rest in peace, couldn’t bear children. She opened her home and her heart to the girl. Some build shrines to the departed, others remove all traces. Rebecca’s body was interned with her biological mother.”

“I can’t imagine their pain.” Joe said. Stuff like that reminded him of his daughter Emily. “Where’s she buried?”

Miller looked suspiciously at Joe. “Michigan, that’s what I was told.”
“Told?”

“She passed in 1950, two years before I became pastor,” Miller explained. “I learned the sad story from Millie when Preston took ill.”

“Preston had his breakdown in 1960. For eight years the subject never came up. I find that strange.” Joe charged.

“Some people don’t wear their hearts on their sleeves. What are you driving at?” The weather changed. The rain ended with the sun breaking through. He shifted on the chair, removing a Phillie’s Cheroot cigar from a pocket in his warm-up.

“Call me cynical,” Joe replied, thinking of Preston’s romp with the gal at the Santa Anita relocation center.

“Call me stiff as a board, how about we take a walk?” Miller asked.

“Great idea,” Joe said, unable to fight the nicotine urge, and not sure how far he could push Miller before the old guy decided to call it quits.

Miller placed the thank you notes into a day planner, zipping the leather case closed. Using a metal cane, he struggled to raise himself from the chair. “Grab the candy.”

At a turtle’s pace, they headed for the exit closest to the pond, where Joe held the door. A practical joker, Miller flipped him a quarter. The temperature rebounded with the sunshine. “Let’s sit on the bench,” Miller suggested. “I can’t go another inch.” Joe put his arm under Miller’s elbow, helping him into a controlled collapse.

Joe retrieved a Marlboro from his jacket. Flipping the Zippo, he held it under Miller’s cheroot. “One of life’s pleasures,” Miller said, savoring the smoke. “The doctors insist I give it up.”

They sat a few minutes watching a pair of Mallards paddle around the pond.

“Preston’s...,” Miller hesitated, “illness put a strain on their marriage, a marriage that was already drowning in the booze he was consuming. I counseled Millie, and believe I made a difference.”

“I understand Millie was a terrific lady.”

“That’s an understatement.” Miller took several quick puffs on the cigar. “I came to town not knowing anyone. I suppose she took pity on this confirmed bachelor by offering an invitation for dinner. That invitation turned into a weekly event. I often wondered what had attracted her to Preston.”

“Did you ever meet this guy?” Joe handed Miller the photo of the airman Rothstein.

Miller held it at arms length. “Should I...”

“Turn it over,” Joe said.

“Rothstein!” Miller shrieked. “I can’t believe it. Is this the face that haunted Preston?”

“I think so,” Joe said, gesturing with the cigarette.

Leaning back on the bench, Miller drifted to another time. “I first heard the name Rothstein at a summer barbecue at the Swedges in the late Fifties. A college friend of Preston’s got pretty sloshed, making a diving fighter plane with his hand. He toasted Rothstein, even sang a round of *Bless Them All*. I thought Rothstein was a college chum who died in the war.”

“He died alright.” Falling under a coughing spell, Joe ground the cigarette into the grass. “A veteran’s website lists Paul Rothstein, United States Army Air Force, killed in action August 20, 1944.”

Joe’s words snapped Miller back to the present. “Where was he from?” Miller asked.

“At the library, I found his obituary on *The New York Times* microfilm. His hometown was Brooklyn, New York. His wife Sarah, his mother and father Rachel and Abraham, and a brother Jacob survived him.” Joe lit another cigarette between coughs.

Miller stared at the ducks. “Paul Rothstein wasn’t a Princeton chum, was he?”

“I strongly doubt a Jewish kid from Brooklyn would’ve been admitted to Princeton in the Thirties,” Joe said with a wry chuckle. “He graduated from N.Y.U.”

“The look on Preston’s friend’s face as his buddy demonstrated the angle of the fighter’s dive sort of fixed the date of the barbecue in my mind. Like when Pearl Harbor was attacked or John Kennedy was assassinated. It was the twentieth of August.”

“Are you sure? It’s almost a lifetime.”

“August twenty is my birthday,” Miller said flatly.

“That friend wouldn’t be Clark Johnson?” Joe asked.

Miller flicked the cigar against the bench arm, warily looking at Joe. “You must’ve been one good detective.”

“The Princeton roommates had a raucous past. Johnson dragged Preston into a few jams.” Joe explained. “Sounds like Clark was celebrating. What was Preston’s demeanor during Johnson’s demonstration?”

“Quiet. He sipped his standard Wild Turkey.” Miller puffed on the cigar, again lost in thought. “Johnson said something that struck me at the time as being the alcohol loosening his tongue. A crazed look overcame his face as he slapped Preston on the back. ‘We changed the world, we changed history.’”

“And Preston?”

“He walked into the house without a word,” Miller said, sounding fatigued.

“Johnson learned to fly fighters,” Joe pointed out. “Did he make it overseas?”

“Wound up in Italy escorting bombers,” Miller said. Through the atrium glass, he saw the blonde nurse return with a wheelchair. “Oh, no! Nurse Ratchet is on her way. We only have a few minutes.” He took a final puff on the cigar before burying it in a sand filled bucket. “I came to know Clark Johnson and his wife fairly well. He was a braggart. I never knew when he was telling the truth. He complained mightily how he was robbed of being credited for two German planes that would have made him an ace.”

The nurse spotted Miller and Joe on the bench, and headed their way. “Reverend, did you think you could hide from me,” she said, pushing a wheelchair.

“Patricia, never,” Miller said, getting to his feet. He looked at Joe. “Preston and Clark were mixed up in something, and my gut tells me it haunted Preston to the day he died.” The nurse helped him into the wheelchair. “Talking to Gloria Johnson might help.” He opened his day

planner. “She must have read about my hospitalization in the Synod bulletin and sent me a get-well card. I saved the address. We haven’t spoken since I officiated at Millie’s funeral thirty-five years ago. Call her and use my name.”

Joe placed the box of candy on Miller’s lap. “Clark is no longer alive?”

Patricia pushed the wheelchair toward the building. Miller held up his hand for her to stop. “Clark passed away suddenly in 1960. I thought losing his friend caused Preston’s mental collapse. After today, I’m not sure.”

“One last question, Reverend,” Joe said, taking Miller’s hand, “Why *did* Rabbi Balaban attend Preston’s funeral.”

Miller looked squarely at Joe. “I never asked.”

Joe watched Miller disappear into the building. He needed a beer and someplace soft to rest his aching head.

His cell rang. “Jozef,” Alenia said.

“How did you know I was thinking about you?” Joe answered, walking around the pond toward visitors parking.

“My grandmother *wuz* a gypsy. I’ll leave the side door open.”

Chapter 25

WESTFIELD, NJ OCTOBER 2000

JOE SILENCED THE CHIME ON HIS TIMEX. Running his hand down the curve of Alenia's back brought a drowsy "hold me" from the one he equated to sexy comfort food. "I've got to get into the shower," he whispered in her ear.

"What time is it?" she asked, pulling the sheet over naked rear.

"Ten-thirty. It's still early for you. For the rest of the world, the day has long begun." He planted a kiss on her forehead.

Alenia pushed his face away. "When will you sleep at my house so I don't have to get up when you leave?"

Joe grabbed her around the waist. Sleeping with another man's wife was one thing, sleeping in his bed was something else. "Rosa wouldn't have a reason to change the sheets if we did."

Irritated, Alenia propped herself on an elbow. "You go to this meeting after not going for a year. Why?"

Joe scooted off the bed, stumbling on an empty bottle of sparkling burgundy tossed onto the floor in the early hours of the morning. "I'm trying to regain my civic responsibility."

"Keeping me happy is *your* responsibility," she shouted back.

He turned on the shower, hoping the hot water would remove knots in his back caused by the Russian émigré's bedroom contortions. His pleas that he wasn't a gymnast brought "if you think like old man you'll be one."

To his relief, Mrs. Gilbert had fallen back asleep by the time he finished shaving. Joe collected his clothes, making his way downstairs.

Roxy stood at the base of the stairs holding Alenia's two hundred dollar Bergdorf Goodman designer bra in her mouth. "Come on girl," Joe said

entering the kitchen. He held a biscuit above her nose. "Drop it!" The lacey rhinestone studded holder of male dreams was exchanged for the canine treat. Joe hung the prize on the metal filigree of the Tiffany lamp over the dinette set, assured that Alenia would be thrilled to find a chunk missing from the top of the right cup. Roxy cocked her head to the side. Joe gave her another biscuit. "I would have gone for the thong."

Joe fumbled with a Windsor knot, not having tied a tie in a year. Successful on his third attempt, he shook his head in the mirror near the front door. There was a time he could do it with his eyes closed and make the ends even. Slipping on his new navy blue blazer, he took four steps back to take stock of the package—Alenia was right. The sky blue tie with red piping looked sharp against his starched white shirt.

He stepped out onto the porch, closing the door with a faint click. "Hey Joe!" Ed Stovall called from across the street, his omnipresent bamboo rake in hand. "Some guy was snooping around the Swedge place."

Joe made his way down the landing to the driveway. "Probably from the wrecking crew. They're supposed to start work any day."

Stovall shook his head. "He looked too old to be working. I asked him what he was doing, and all I got was a dirty look. I watched him get into one of those damn Japanese compact cars parked down the block."

"What make and what color?" Joe asked.

"It was white," Stovall answered. "I don't know the make. All those pieces of shit look the same."

"How about a plate number," Joe asked, already knowing the answer.

"Too far away. My eyes aren't what they used to be," Stovall admitted reluctantly.

"You should've tackled him and made a citizen's arrest," Joe said with a suppressed laugh.

"Not with this guy," Stovall said, shaking his head. "He must've been six-six and two fifty."

Joe opened the driver's door of the Volvo. "Big dude."

"Where you going dressed to the nines? A funeral?"

"The Downtown meeting." Joe held up his hand. "Don't ask me why I'm going after a year."

Stovall had remained active in the group despite selling his sporting goods business. "I'd like to see you make your grand entrance, but I can't."

I've got an urologist appointment."

Joe felt pain below his belt thinking of having his privates checked. "I'll give you a report." Using a withered newspaper to sweep crumbs and cigarette ash off the driver's seat, Joe settled behind the wheel. He tossed the paper on top of a collection of coffee cups, assorted fast food wrappers, a pizza box, and half dozen empty beer cans.

Slipping the key into the ignition, he said a prayer to the lemon god. For seven hundred dollars the dealer could assure the starting problem would become a painful memory. He'd sooner arrange with a Plainfield homeboy to have the damn piece of junk *disappear* and use the insurance to buy a new Explorer.

The gods were smiling. A ten second groan from under the hood and a tap on the accelerator brought the V70 wagon to life. The dashboard clock read 11:17. He had plenty of time to take care of a little business before the twelve-thirty Downtown Association meeting.

Driving time from Tanglewood Lane to the Westfield Police headquarters on Broad Street was a half of a Marlboro. Joe turned into the municipal complex. Like tying a Windsor knot, he hadn't stepped inside the place he had called his home away from home in a year.

His first inclination was to leave the Volvo in the space designated for Chief Willard Saurbraun. Their tumultuous head banging relationship ended with the U.S. Attorney for New Jersey's forceful suggestion that Joe's disability claim be honored or allegations of bribery and extortion would be referred to state prosecutors. Dr. Headcase said he needed to let go of his anger, not to live in the past. He had the ability to keep his hand off the switch that turned on his anger. After a crisp "Fuck you!" he parked in the lone handicapped parking space.

Armed with the five-iron and a smile as fake as the town's colonial image painted on a mural above the wall of bulletproof glass surrounding central receiving, Joe faced a civilian dispatcher hired after his retirement. Open access to the operations end of the police department ceased during the year of Joe's absence after a detainee grabbed a firearm.

"Buzz me in," Joe requested, standing at the door of a 1800s jail cell outfitted to open electronically.

"I don't recognize you. Please show your I.D.," crackled over the intercom.

"It's okay, buzz him in," Bill Fielder the sergeant-in-charge ordered. "Lieutenant, I'll meet you in the hall."

The whirl of gears retracting the gate coincided with Fielder's entrance into the hall. "You should've called," he said, giving Joe a rap on the back. "Sure is good to see you lost the caveman look."

"All good things have to come to an end," Joe answered. "Fredericks around?"

"He just came back from a meeting at the high school," Fielder said. "A kid was selling pot in the cafeteria. The principal thinks it's a fucking joke."

"Nothing changes," Joe said, inching down the hall trying to get away before being asked to dinner.

"The missus keeps asking when you're coming over," Fielder said with a hand on Joe's arm.

"Soon, Bill, soon," Joe said with a disguised wince. He wanted to add "don't hold your breath," or "when Hell freezes over." Fielder was a great guy, but his wife's cooking and his two sons who were one step above Neanderthal man on the evolutionary ladder didn't make for an evening to die for.

"I'll be waiting." Fielder disappeared through a side door.

Spotlighted photos of past police chiefs and officers killed in the line of duty and military service lined the hall. Joe turned his head away from a montage chronicling the John List arrest. Chief Willard Saurbraun bedecked with battle ribbons and commendations, including those Joe claimed he ripped off in the Cub Scouts, had wormed his way in between Joe and the host of *America's Most Wanted*. Seeing the pudgy spider lined face was capable of raising Joe's blood pressure by twenty points.

"No need to throw rose petals," Joe said, entering the five man detective unit. A renovation done under Joe's watch placed four desks into cubicles, each complete with a computer. None were occupied. Bringing his own PC into the computer-less station in 1987 reinforced Saurbraun's view of the sergeant from the city across the Hudson River as a New York know-it-all.

Unit secretary Alice Croyston dropped the file she was holding. "I thought you were dead." The two had become "close" over twenty years. Joe's self-imposed agoraphobia tried her understanding. She stopped calling.

Looking uncomfortable, Joe said, "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated." He gave her a kiss on the cheek. "The boys out?"

"One sick, one on vacation, two at a burglary," Alice said, picking up the file.

"Fredericks?" Joe asked.

"Locked in his office," Alice said, thumbing over her shoulder. "I think he has a porno collection."

"I'll bring him back to reality." Joe crossed the forty by forty austere space, shaking his head at Fredericks' name on the doorplate, still not understanding how the kid was promoted to be *his* replacement. In a deadpan imitation of Chief Saurbraun, Joe boomed within inches of the burled walnut door, "God damn it Fredericks, stop jerking your chain." He pressed his ear to the door.

"One second, Chief." The door opened with Fredericks buttoning his shirt cuffs. He looked at Joe. "Funny to the extreme."

Alice turned away, stifling a laugh. It was times like this she missed the most after Joe left the department. "Mrs. Fox called concerning her missing garbage cans for the fifth time."

Fredericks waved her off. With hands on his hips, he said to Joe coolly, "It must be important if you've gotten up before noon." He returned to his desk.

Joe entered the office he occupied for ten years. Nothing was the same. It was like he was eleven again, standing in the living room of the house he lived in for the first five years of his life. "I shouldn't have tossed you out of my house when you gave me the print results. I'm sorry."

Fredericks leaned back in his chair. Joe's apology was a first. He looked at a folder on the desk. "Forget about it."

"We've got to get together and continue our discussion on St. John," Joe deadpanned.

Fredericks looked up, his mouth agape. "It would be my...", he paused, "You don't mean a word of it."

Slapping the five-iron against his leg, Joe broke into a smile. "Detective Lieutenant, I'm insulted." He handed Fredericks the photo of Rebecca Swedge.

"Who's the kid?"

“Preston Swedge’s adopted daughter Rebecca. Died after being hit by a car,” Joe said. “I want you to do me a favor and dig up the accident report and death certificate.”

“When did she die?” Fredericks asked, screwing up his face.

“December 1951, I think.”

Fredericks was on his feet. “You’re kidding. Those records aren’t computerized. I’ve got five cases— four burglaries and a suspected hate crime that has everyone and his sister screaming. I don’t have the time or the resources to go on scavenger hunt. ”

Joe lit a Marlboro despite the “No Smoking” signs throughout the building. “You forgot Mrs. Fox and the great garbage can caper.”

“Why the interest?” Fredericks placed a metal wastebasket on his desk.

Joe took the hint, flicking ash into it. “Part of my therapy. My therapist thinks acting like a cop will lead to getting back into a productive life.” The burning sensation returned to his chest. He crushed the cigarette inside the wastebasket.

Fredericks sighed. “Bullshit, more bullshit, and truckloads of bullshit. Your master degree should be in bullshit.” He drummed on the desk with his fingers. “Give me a couple of days.”

“I need two other things,” Joe said, resuming the tone of Fredericks’ boss. “Run a DMV check for the license of Jacob or Jake Rothstein and check Ted Steele for a long shot.”

Fredericks removed his 9mm Glock from its shoulder holster. “Get out of here before it gets messy.”

Joe tapped the desk with the club. “Appreciate it.”

“Alice! I’ve got a job for you,” Fredericks called.

Joe stopped at Alice’s desk. “He has a Hustler under his desk,” he said, cupping a hand over his mouth.

“I thought so.” Alice gave Joe a hug. “Don’t be a stranger.”

Joe fought back a tear. He missed Alice and the damn job. What he didn’t miss was Willard Saurbraun standing in the hall with his hands on his hips. Gripping the five-iron, he advanced toward his ex-chief.

“What in hell are you doing here?” Saurbraun demanded. “I thought we had an understanding.”

Saurbraun’s begrudging acquiescence to Joe’s disability claim included a pledge by the injured cop to stay away from headquarters—no Christmas

parties, commendation ceremonies, or dropping by for a cup of coffee. “Advocating for all the missing garbage cans in town. Garbage cans have inalienable rights of government protection. Where’s the public outcry?” Joe said as he drew even with Saurbraun.

Saurbraun took two steps back. “You’re a crazy son of a bitch.”

“No Chief, I’m a romantic.” Joe said, visualizing the anger switch. Oh how he wanted to throttle the bastard. He faced the security camera that had captured the confrontation. Without a word, the gate opened.

Joe blew a kiss to the civilian dispatcher and exited the building glad not to have run into any other familiar faces. It wasn’t the forced small talk but the questions behind the *looks*. Word of his falling into the bottle had traveled through the Department. He didn’t know if it was blabbered by Fredericks or Fielder, but a rumor about a botched suicide by overdosing on pain pills smacked of Chief Willie.

Joe lit a cigarette, watching Saurbraun get into his unmarked cruiser. Joe followed in the Volvo, keeping two car lengths behind for the quarter mile trip on Broad Street to the center of town. He didn’t need to follow Chief Willie under the railroad overpass. For ten years, Tuesday meant an afternoon kickback with a woman in a duplex near the 7-Eleven. Joe found it ironic that the man who restricted hiring black officers to one “nigger” to police the rundown section near the vehicle inspection station had a girlfriend the color of brown sugar.

A plethora of “FOR RENT” signs and vacant storefronts lined the shopping district. The movie theater had shown its last flick the month before. “Seedy,” Joe said to himself. Making a right turn onto Prospect Street, he pulled into the municipal parking lot, a half block up the street from Forno’s Restaurante. The lot was full of bargain hunters picking through the remains of The College Shop, a family business slated to close after sixty years. Once a destination store for kids going away to school, it had lost its edge to the hip fashion places in the mall. Circling the lot, he found a spot between a BMW and a British racing green Jaguar with LBI decals plastered on the rear window. LBI was the place at the Jersey shore where those in the know had summer places to booze it up and barbeque. The Jag belonged to his sometime friend and attorney Mel Katz.

He shifted the Volvo into park. He hadn’t spoken to Katz for six months since the former county prosecutor suggested a stint in a re-hab facility

might save his life and his marriage. With scant inches between the cars, Joe twisted his legs to get out, knocking a sandwich bag of change to the pavement from a pouch in the door.

Bending to pick up the fistful of coins brought him eye level to a pair of shapely legs camouflaged by sheer gray stockings. “How’s my favorite lingerie shop owner?” Joe asked, pushing himself upright with the five-iron.

Kim Angreen, a pixyish five-two and no more than a hundred fifteen pounds soaking wet brunette, locked an arm around his waist. “Joseph Henderson, where the fuck have you been?” She let out a hearty laugh.

A good ten years his junior, Kim had *that* special something— beauty, ribald sense of humor, and brains. Over the years, they had shared coffee and cigarettes at the local hash house and an occasional round of golf. Joe often wondered what might have been in another time and place. “Mostly nowhere,” Joe replied. He put the bag on the seat, locking the car with the key remote. “I saw the sign in the window.”

“When my lease is up at the end of next month, I’m going on vacation. I can’t compete with Victoria’s Secret,” Kim said with a glint of remorse. “I tried, but I can’t cover the overhead.” She was one of many local merchants drowning in the rising tide of escalating rents. When a coast-to-coast music chain was willing to pay ten times the rent than an existing bagel shop, the handwriting was scrawled on the brick walls for the mom and pops. The landlords were holding out for their ships to sail in with both the Golden Goose and the pot of gold.

“Elm Street won’t be the same,” Joe said.

Pitching a half-eaten apple into a trashcan, she said, “I heard about Elaine.”

“Shit happens,” Joe replied. “Maybe it’s for the best.”

Kim wrinkled her nose, but didn’t say anything. They walked to the corner stepping around a young fashionably dressed white woman in a pink jogging outfit and her Jamaican woman pushing a baby in a stroller. “What’s the difference between an au pair and a nanny?” Joe asked Kim as they stopped at the crosswalk.

“The level of education?” Kim guessed.

Joe shook his head. “Nannies come from Jamaica with their belongings stuffed in a two dollar suitcase. Au pairs come from Sweden fully loaded with large chests and blonde hair.”

"I think I know the source of all your troubles," Kim said. "You weren't breast fed."

"Bingo! That's what my shrink said. I'm supposed to make up for lost time," Joe said, crossing his eyes. Broad Street lunch hour traffic was routinely heavy. One of the Downtown Association's pet projects had been placing traffic cops on the busiest corners. Prospect Street was penciled into the duty schedule six days a week. "Officer, I have a pressing appointment," Joe called, stepping off the curb.

"Stay on the sidewalk!" the uniformed officer barked.

Joe looked at Kim, mustering a shrug of his shoulders. "Doesn't he know that I'm *the* hero cop? Damn rookie."

"Doesn't look like he's old enough to shave," Kim cracked.

The cop held up both hands, stopping traffic. A Lexus screeched to a halt, drawing a glare. "Cross."

Joe slipped his arm under Kim's, escorting her across the street. Kim stopped ten feet from the entrance to Forno's. "I make a mean filet mignon."

"Is that an invitation?" Joe asked.

"Not until I give you the time." Kim paused, "Seven-fifteen."

"You drive a hard bargain," Joe said.

Kim squeezed his arm. "Like you said, shit happens."

Forno's, located between Shoes-Like-Nu and Country Corners Home Furnishings, became the official meeting place for the Downtown Association for one good reason: Carmine Forno declared the food was on the house along with the use of the private party room. That was when the original number of members totaled an even twelve. The present roll numbered thirty five, and Carmine was negotiating for relief. He needed ten dollars a head or the Association could go back to the YMCA.

Carmine ran the kitchen, but Mama, as his wife Savina was called by anyone who stepped through the door more than once, stood guard over the cash register.

"I've got to sit with the women. I'll see you later," Kim said, stepping into the restaurant.

"It's our little secret," Joe said, placing his index finger to his mouth. He didn't understand why the delectable package in her Burberry tailored suit never had been swept off her feet by some lucky guy.

“I don’t believe it,” Mama said, moving around the counter. Mid-sixties, statuesque in a black silk dress complete with a strand of pearls that reached the apex of her ample cleavage, she clasped Joe around his neck, giving him a kiss on each cheek. “Joe, you better never stay away so long.”

Joe kissed her olive toned hand. “I promise.”

“I have to tell Carmine you’re here,” Mama said. “Isabel, take the counter.” She disappeared through the kitchen’s swinging door. Four preschool girls gnawed on pizza slices, finger painting the table with fruit juices and soda while their stick thin mothers debated the advantages of one private school over another.

Forno’s was divided into two sections: paper plates and pizza to the right of the register; linen tablecloths and leather bound menus to the left. Joe meandered through the empty dining room. His entering the rear private room drew curious looks and a smattering of sarcastic applause. Four chaffing dishes and two large glass salad bowls occupied a rectangular table against the wall to the right of the entrance. Six round tables set with Forno’s fine china and lead crystal were dispersed around a ten by twenty hardwood dance floor. Oil paintings of Rome, Venice, and Florence adorned the walls.

Mel Katz sitting alone at a table for eight pointed to a chair next to him. Joe wandered over. “Let’s see some identification,” Katz joked, working on a plate of baked ziti and chicken Marsala.

Joe gave him the middle finger. “I’m still waiting for your return call,” he said with mild irritation, pulling out a chair.

Taking a bite out of a piece of bread, Katz said, “It’s on my to-do list for this afternoon. What’s so important?”

Joe plucked a breadstick from a vase in the center of the table. “Elaine e-mailed her desire for a divorce.”

Katz buttered his bread. “Intentions are nothing until the sheriff serves the papers. Women like to talk.”

“Not much of a crowd,” Joe said, looking at the tables with vacant seats.

“The Downtown Association is in a state of flux. Seventy-five percent attendance is a rousing success.” Katz took a sip of water. “Why today?”

“I assume you mean why did I come to the meeting after not attending for a year?” Joe said, fiddling for a cigarette in the inside pocket of his sport jacket.

“Forget about lighting up. Mama’s got new rules—no ringing cell phones and no smoking. To answer your question, yes,” Katz said.

“I could use help with financial planning,” Joe said, drawing a skeptical look from Katz. There were several faces he didn’t recognize. “Which one’s Hargrove?”

“The three piece suit sitting next to Barry Martinson.”

Owner of a haberdashery shop known for designer labels and astronomic prices, Martinson was the Association president and also a force at the Westfield temple. Well over six feet, his swept back black hair highlighted with splashes of gray at the temples made him a dead ringer for the late actor Caesar Romero. Lester Hargrove was a rather nondescript, balding middle-aged man looking as if he stepped out of the 1930s with his blue pinstriped three-piece suit and watch bob.

“What’s his deal?” Joe asked.

“Les is a tax attorney with a practice heavy in estate planning. He’s lived and practiced in town since 1960, kind of quiet, stays to himself, a good guy,” Katz said, wiping his mouth. “You better get something to eat before the meeting starts.”

Joe rose. “You wouldn’t be related to Harold Katz by any chance?”

Katz held his fork two inches from his mouth. “Where’s he from?”

“Brooklyn. He owned a deli in the 1930s.”

“Not to my knowledge. Where do you come up with this stuff?” Katz finished his last bite of ziti. “You sure you didn’t suffer a head injury in addition to your leg?”

“Just asking,” Joe said. He made his way to the buffet, surveying the choices of ziti, chicken Marsala, and sausages with peppers. Scooping a ladle of each onto his plate, Joe wondered if Carmine assembled the buffet from the previous night’s leftovers.

Kim eased behind Joe. “Joe, great to see you,” Martinson said, eyeing Joe’s sport jacket. “Kim, can you believe he’s decided to grace our presence.”

“And I hope to see more of him,” Kim said, delivering a covert pinch to Joe’s rear end.

“Joe,” Martinson said, cutting his chicken piece into four. “You must know Lester Hargrove.”

Joe moved away from the buffet table, extending his hand toward Hargrove. “Actually, I haven’t had the pleasure.”

Hargrove, picking at his salad, was locked onto the screen of his laptop computer. He didn’t move either to stand or shake hands. Wires ran from the laptop to a projector focused on the wall behind. “I didn’t catch your name.”

“Henderson, Joe Henderson.”

Hargrove stared at Joe. “Ruth Ritchie told me you removed the papers from the basement in the Swedge house.”

Martinson’s ears perked up, looking first at Joe then at Hargrove. “I did, and would appreciate a few minutes at the end of the meeting,” Joe said. Hargrove mumbled something Joe took for the word sure. Joe was sure of one thing—the tax attorney had the social skills of a twelve year old.

Mel Katz pounded the table laughing at one of Bud Kerrigan’s jokes. The undertaker had snuck into Forno’s through the service entrance in the alley behind the restaurant. “Joe’s a man of his word. He said that he would show, and by God he did,” Kerrigan said, squeezing Joe around the shoulders. “I’ve got to grab a bite and scoot. I have a client waiting in destiny’s transporter.”

“Ask Carmine for a doggy bag,” Joe quipped. He re-took the chair next to Mel, sliding the five-iron under the table. Joe relished the lasagna, dipping a piece of bread into the extra sauce he scrapped from the pan. “How’s Kope and Naomi?” he asked Mel.

Mel shook his head. “My aunt is holding her own, but my uncle is failing fast. His eyesight is worse. They’re both eighty-one, I suppose it could be worse.”

“He didn’t do too bad the last time we played golf,” Joe said.

“We’ve got to start the meeting,” Mel said, looking toward Barry Martinson pointing to his watch. Martinson gave the thumbs up. “That was over a year ago, before you turned into a hermit.”

“I have to get off my butt and get over for a visit,” Joe said.

“They’ll be back in two days. Went to D.C. to visit my cousin,” Mel said, again signaling Martinson to begin the meeting.

Barry Martinson stood, ringing his water glass with a spoon. “I’d like to introduce Lester Hargrove...”

“Excuse! Excuse!” Carmine Forno called, pushing a cart with two trays of fluted champagne glasses onto the dance floor. He took two glasses from the tray, handing one to Joe. “In honor of Lieutenant Joe coming back from the dead!” They clinked glasses, each downing the Asti Spumante. “Everybody, helpa yourselves.”

Carmine shook hands with Joe, spun on his heels and returned to the kitchen. Toasts and a chorus of *He’s a Jolly Good Fellow* ended with Joe taking a bow. Martinson grasped the back of his chair. “It is my pleasure to introduce Lester Hargrove. Lester is...”

“And they say that being an asshole doesn’t pay,” Joe said to Mel. “They love me.”

“Thank you, Barry.” Hargrove cleared his throat three times. “Estate planning should begin...”

Joe turned to Mel. “Lester, the molester. I don’t like the looks of him.”

“Shut up,” Mel whispered. “I can’t concentrate on what Hargrove is talking about.”

Knives and forks rattled in the background. The lights were dimmed. “The graph on the left denotes the taxation rate in 1975. On the right is the current rate. It is easy...,” Hargrove droned on.

Joe checked his watch— *twenty more minutes of Hell*. “Kope and Naomi graduated from N.Y.U.,” he said to Mel. “Do you know what year?”

“1941. No it was ’42. My aunt was looking at her yearbook the last time I was over,” Mel said. “The man is trying to give a presentation. Are you taking your medication?”

Hargrove’s *Power Point* presentation slides flashed on the wall. A kaleidoscope of facts, figures, charts and pie grafts were highlighted by the tax attorney’s laser pointer. Joe watched the heads bobbing, not knowing if it was the campaign or Hargrove’s monotone. Mercifully, the lights were raised. The guest of honor answered several softball questions and received a polite round of applause.

“I need to talk to Hargrove,” Joe said.

“I’m going to scoot. If you’re served, call me,” Mel was up and off.

Joe retrieved the five-iron, making his way between well-wishers to Hargrove who was dismantling the projector. “Very informative, Mr. Hargrove,” Joe said. “I wish I had this information years ago.”

Hargrove unplugged the projector. "It's never too late to make a proper plan," he said with satisfaction.

"Like Preston Swedge?" Joe asked with a faint smile.

Hargrove wound the wire from the laptop to the projector around his hand. Grimacing, he asked, "What is it you're asking?"

Joe studied Hargrove's face. The counselor had a strange habit of scrunching his face. Joe couldn't decide if Hargrove was constipated or hadn't been laid in years. "Preston began donating money to the Westfield temple in 1960 around the time of the Jewish high holidays. I'm curious to know why."

Closing the laptop, Hargrove collected his notes. "I was a neophyte in practice when Mr. Swedge walked into my office. I was glad for the work. He paid my fee. I didn't ask his motivation."

Joe placed the five-iron under his arm. "Anyone who has lived forty years in town knows Preston's reputation. It never crossed your mind that his yearly donation ran opposite to his history?"

Hargrove shifted uneasily from foot to foot, fiddling with his pocket watch. "No. Why don't you ask Barry?"

Martinson caught the tail end of the discussion. "What should I be asked?" He moved around the table to stand next to Joe.

"Why did Preston Swedge make a yearly donation to the temple?" Joe wasn't smiling.

Martinson ran his hands over Joe's shoulders then down the sleeves. "The funds were deposited into the rabbi's discretionary fund. It was between Bernie Balaban and Mr. Swedge. Nothing stays a secret for ever, something to do with Adolf Eichmann and the Holocaust. I didn't push it. It isn't everyday that a gentile becomes a major benefactor of a Jewish organization."

Hargrove strapped his paraphernalia to a small luggage cart. "Thanks for the opportunity Barry. Mr. Henderson, if you would like a consultation for your estate needs, please call." He handed Joe his business card.

Martinson scrutinized Joe's sport jacket. "I could swear I sold this jacket to a very sexy lady married to a very wealthy gentleman."

Joe wanted to smack himself in the head with the five-iron for wearing Alenia's gift. "I bought this at one of the discount places on the highway. Cost me a hundred bucks."

“It’s an eight hundred dollar item,” Martinson said. “You’re a lucky guy.”

“In more ways than one,” Joe said. His cell phone chimed.

“Jozef!” Alenia screeched. “Someone tried to break in!”

“Your house?”

“No! Your house. A big man was looking in from door to the deck,” she said with terror in her voice. “The dog scared him off.”

“Did you call the police?”

“You’re the police. Come soon.”

Chapter 26

PRINCETON, NJ OCTOBER 2000

JOE POUNDED PRESTON'S FAKE SECURITY COMPANY monitoring sign into the grass at the base of the front steps. He knew it was meaningless—only a perp on crack with an I.Q. of 35 would fall for it.

Alenia's description of the would-be intruder matched Ed Stovall's snooper around the Swedge place on three points—tall, hulking, and gray hair, but didn't move like an old man. Alenia threw in one tidbit: his eyes. There was something “bad” about them, the way he looked at her gave her the “kureeps.” Joe pointed out that she was lucky, considering a “bad” man was looking at a very well-endowed naked lady in search of her brassiere.

Joe had no doubt the guy was casing the house and the combination of Alenia's screaming and Roxy's barking drove him off. There had been a rash of break-ins around town with three in the area just the last week. He wondered what asshole would want to boost a cop's house, then again, nothing would be a surprise.

Joe slid behind the wheel of the Volvo and tossed directions downloaded from the Web on the passenger seat. The widow of Clark Johnson sounded guarded when Joe asked if she had a few minutes time, that he was an author researching material for a book on the isolationist movement prior to America's entry into World War Two. He had known Preston Swedge for twenty years and they also shared a mutual friend—James Miller. The mention of Miller's name was the secret word. “Two o'clock will be fine,” Gloria said. “I hope you like chocolate chip cookies. I made a fresh batch this morning.”

Joe looked at every Japanese white compact car as he wound his way through the center of town and south toward U.S. Highway 1—young

women with kids in car seats, grandmas, and a priest, but no gray haired old “bad” man.

He tried to imagine what the highway looked like from the rear seat of Herbert Swedge’s Packard. The entire Route 1 corridor was now condominiums, strip malls and large industrial parks, not the cornfields, vegetable and dairy farms of 1938 that made New Jersey the “Garden State.”

Bumper to bumper traffic lengthened the forty minute trip to an hour and a half. He was running fifteen minutes behind schedule. Joe followed the signs for Princeton, taking the exit onto Harrison Street. Two lanes widened to four. A granite pointed bridge offered panoramic views of the Millstone River where the Princeton University sculling team had four boats practicing. He chuckled at the thought of his father who took him to Princeton basketball games hoping his son would take the academic path and break the family tradition of the N.Y.P.D. When Joe’s S.A.T. scores squeaked above the bowling average of the older Henderson, talk of becoming a Princeton Tiger ceased.

Joe checked the directions—right on Nassau Street, three blocks, left on Cedar. He clicked the turn signal, breaking for a red light at the Nassau intersection. The main drag through the borough was packed with traffic heading from the shopping district. Joe lit a cigarette, second guessing his choice of using an author for his cover story. Bluffing wasn’t his strong suit. His paltry poker winnings at the weekly game he attended before being shot were proof.

The light cycled twice before the clog cleared. Joe maneuvered around a box truck jutting into the lane. A yellow cab turned left onto Cedar Lane, stopping to discharge its fare. A middle age man with a large black hat and black suit got out. Adjusting his *yarmulke*, he walked with a slouch toward the main entrance of the Jewish Center of Princeton. Joe chuckled to himself—he’d have to ask Gloria Johnson if the building was built before or after her anti-Semitic husband died.

225 Cedar Lane was a stately, white brick, Georgian colonial. Plants of every description provided an ever changing pallet of fall color against a lawn manicured to perfection. Joe parked in the vacant driveway, taking a curved path of crimson pavers to a fieldstone landing.

Tapping a heavy brass knocker mounted on the front door painted the same color as the walk's pavers produced no immediate response. Slowly, the door opened revealing a lady no taller than Ruth Ritchie dressed in a tight fitting white turtleneck sweater and a pair of black designer jeans. Joe thought of the cheerleader who met Clark Johnson the night Orson Wells scared the bejesus out of the American public with his *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast. All she was lacking was a pair of pompoms. Her face bore deep creases from sixty years of worshipping the sun. Cornflower-blue eyes and gray flecked blonde hair cut in a pageboy completed the package. "Mrs. Johnson, I'm sorry I'm late."

"Don't be silly," Gloria Johnson said in a smoky voice. "Mr. Henderson, come in."

Joe leaned heavily on the five-iron crossing the threshold. Driving around Westfield made his leg ache. Ninety minutes of stop and go traffic caused severe calf pain and loss of feeling in his foot. "Are you okay?" Gloria asked.

"Old war injury," Joe said, taking in the décor. Hand printed wallpaper featuring falling leaves lined the entranceway. Birds of Paradise were arranged in a Kosta Boda glass vase on an heirloom mission red oak console table. An ensemble of family pictures was clustered around the departed Clark. He stole a look at picture of a young boy, five or six, sitting on Clark's lap. There was no question Clark was the father.

"I hope you don't mind the kitchen," Gloria said, leading the way. The aroma of brewed coffee wafted down the hallway.

Joe peaked into the formal dining room. Antiques were not his forte, but he recognized money when he saw it. The house was furnished with a taste he hadn't seen except for when he couldn't sleep, passing the early morning hours watching the decorating channels on the cable.

Giant mums in a large crystal vase were on the kitchen's center island. Sea island green granite countertops, stainless steel appliances, and rosewood raised panel cabinets highlighted the updated kitchen. Joe did the math—it was a hundred grand renovation if it cost a nickel. The woman had been a widow for forty years. He wondered where the money flowed from.

"Can I get you some coffee?" Gloria asked, retrieving two large hand-painted mugs, each with the scene of the sun setting on Maui. "It's fresh."

“Perfect,” Joe replied, tempted to ask for extra cream and a dose or two of Vicodin. His leg was hurting worse than it had in months. Joe took a seat at an antique country table.

Gloria placed a mug and a tray of the promised chocolate chip cookies and a pitcher of cream before Joe. “Mr. Henderson,” she said. “sugar is in the bowl.”

“All my friends call me Joe, Mrs. Johnson,” he said, pouring a shot of cream into his coffee.

“Mrs. Johnson was my mother in law. I’m Gloria,” she said, removing a sterling monogrammed silver cigarette case from her handbag on the counter. “I’m glad to hear Reverend Miller is on the mend.” She lit a cigarette with a matching silver lighter.

“I saw him two days ago, he looks good for what he’s gone through.” Joe retrieved a Marlboro from the inside pocket of his sport jacket.

Gloria took a seat at the table. “I lost contact with Preston after Millie died.”

“I understand she was a wonderful person,” Joe said, taking a sip of coffee. “He spoke highly of you and told me more than once how much he missed you.”

Gloria didn’t comment on Joe’s fabrication. She looked Joe squarely in the eye, taking a long drag on the cigarette. “Joe, I’m not familiar with your work.”

Not losing her glare, he responded, “I freelance for a handful of magazines. Maybe you saw the piece I did in *American Warrior* last month.”

“Sounds like Tolstoy,” Gloria jibed. “Tell me the premise of your book.”

“America was deeply divided before World War Two. One camp was itching to join the fray, the other to stay out.”

“Those against going to war were no less patriotic, even though that’s how they were portrayed,” Gloria said, moving a cut-crystal ashtray to the middle of the table.

“Precisely,” Joe said. “Once Pearl Harbor occurred, the United States was in the war and the former isolationists were in the army doing their duty.”

“And dying,” Gloria interjected.

“My book looks at the lives of the men and women who fought to keep the country out of the war then became heroes.” Joe watched Gloria soften.

"I spent many hours with Preston talking history. He was a brilliant. I learned much from the man who was *there*."

Gloria broke a cookie in half, taking a nibble. "For so many years, people like Charles Lindbergh were dragged through the mud for his stance prior to Pearl Harbor. What Roosevelt did to him was despicable. Not making him a general was so wrong."

Joe's cell phone chimed the Three Stooges theme song. "Excuse me," he said, reading Dan Fredericks' number on the caller I.D. "Danny, how are you?"

"Are you getting laid?" Fredericks cracked.

"Something like that. What do you have for me?"

"Alice combed the files, not finding any vehicular fatalities concerning a child during the year 1951 or 1952. Likewise, there's no death certificate for a Rebecca Swedge." Fredericks paused, "Don't bother me again with shit about Preston Swedge."

"Thanks. The book is coming along fine. I'll talk to you soon," Joe said, ending the call. "Sorry. My agent likes to make nice. Where were we?"

Gloria exhaled a curl of smoke from the corner of her mouth. "I was talking about how Charles Lindbergh was mistreated by Franklin Roosevelt."

Joe removed a three by five reporter's spiral notebook from his jacket and began flipping through the pages. The scrawl was notes taken in his Rutgers's class. "Preston told me your husband was one heck of a fighter pilot."

"Clark was one plane short of being an Ace," she took a final drag on the cigarette, stabbing it out in the ashtray. "Would you like to see his war memorabilia?"

Joe picked a cookie off the tray. "That's exactly what I'm looking for."

"Come." She took her coffee mug.

Joe tagged behind, crossing into the formal dining room. A hand carved walnut table for twelve, polished to a mirror finish, reflected his face. Gloria stood with one hand on a closed pocket door. "I left the den the way it was when Clark passed." She slid the door open.

The den was a museum. Framed photographs lined the walls chronicling Clark's air force career from flight school to bases in the Mediterranean and his career at Ford Motor. Joe had to be careful not to hit his head on model

airplanes suspended by piano wire from the ceiling. He spun the propeller on a P-51 Mustang fighter.

“I lowered the planes so I could dust them. You don’t find many wooden models anymore,” she said proudly, sitting at a roll-top desk.

Joe scrutinized the picture gallery: Clark standing beside his P-51; Clark holding a bandolier of machine gun bullets; Clark standing bare-chested with a .45 automatic stuck in the waistband of his pants. “Clark looks like he was in fighting shape,” Joe said, pointing to the toned Princeton grad that had to have lost forty pounds. The face in the 1942 Princeton University yearbook belonged to a softie, a momma’s boy. Clark looked like he could have given a good fight.

Gloria laughed. “Believe me, Mr. America didn’t last long after he came home.”

Joe moved down the line. Clark was standing next to a staff car bearing the insignia of a two star general. In the background, a Quonset hut with “325th Fighter Group” painted above the door. “The 325th flew escort on some tough missions,” Joe said, writing the group number in his notebook. “How long was he stationed in Italy?”

Gloria looked at the model planes. “From the middle of 1943 to the end of the war. He came back to the States in October 1945.”

“You wouldn’t by chance have his flight log book?” Joe asked. “Most pilots brought their’s home.”

Reaching into the bottom drawer of the desk, Gloria retrieved a rectangular brown cloth covered book. She handed the artifact to Joe. “Take your time. I’ve got all afternoon.” Joe watched Gloria recede down the hall, not certain where to rank the widow on his “callous scale.” He sat at the desk. Lt. Clark Johnson 325th Fighter Group was printed on the cover in tight grammar school cursive. Joe skimmed through the beige pages glimpsing into the daily life of a twenty-four year old kid playing in a game of machine gun dodge ball at fifteen thousand feet. 11-3-43 A Messerschmitt Bf 109 shot down while escorting a B-17 mission to Berlin. 3-23-44 Focke Wulf 190 downed over Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia supporting partisan operation. 5-08-44 Messerschmitt confirmed twenty miles west of Budapest, Hungary. Joe turned to 8-20-44. The notation— routine escort mission to Manowitz, Poland.

Gloria returned. "Do you have a sense of the man?" she asked in a detached way.

"Brave guy." Joe handed her the logbook. "Did Clark ever talk about his missions? My father had nightmares till the day he died." Joe's father never made it out of the Brooklyn Navy Yard. His destroyer failed its seaworthy tests.

"Never," Gloria said, putting the book back into the desk drawer. "Clark said he did what he had to do and would have done it again no questions asked."

"My Vietnam experience wasn't so patriotic," Joe said, fishing in his shirt pocket for the Rothstein photo. "Did Clark ever talk about this pilot?" He held the photo at arms length.

"Who is he?" she asked.

"Turn it over."

Gloria flipped the photo over, reading the transcription without a flinch. "Clark never mentioned him. Was Paul Rothstein a fighter pilot?"

Joe shook his head. "He was a bomber pilot stationed in Italy."

"Different bases. Fighters and bombers never mixed." Gloria handed the photo back. She checked her watch. "I stupidly forgot that I have a dentist appointment. I've got to get going."

"So do I," Joe said, recognizing a get the hell out of my house, you lying bastard. "Maybe you can help me out with this." He handed her Rebecca's picture.

"Who is...she?" Gloria stammered.

"The Swedge's adopted daughter. Do you know where she lives?"

"You lied to me! You're not a writer, Detective Henderson," Gloria spat. "I should have done a web search when you called."

"Retired detective." Joe bowed. "I just might write a book when I figure out what happened to Paul Rothstein."

Gloria pointed to the door, "You have thirty seconds to get out of my house before I call the police."

Joe picked up the five-iron. "One last question, was the Jewish Center built before or after Clark's death?"

"It was completed a year after," she said.

"Beautiful," Joe said. "I'll find my way out."

Chapter 27

PRINCETON, NJ OCTOBER 2000

SITTING IN THE VOLVO, Joe was glad that Gloria Johnson didn't have a gun. He'd seen that look on women who had shot their husbands. Preston's diary entries cast little light on Clark Johnson's widow other than she had been a cutie. There was zero doubt in his mind that Gloria knew what happened to Paul Rothstein and Preston's adopted daughter.

Keeping with his theme of repairing fences, Joe found his way back to Nassau Street, joining the crush of traffic to Princeton's central district—his destination, *The Princeton Gazette* where his friend Manny Eisen was publisher and editor. Eisen suffered severe neck injuries the day Joe nearly lost his leg. The two hadn't talked but once after being released from their hospital room. Dr. Headcase's explanation of Joe's avoidance of anyone connected to the incident was consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder. Joe held another opinion—he was just being an ass.

Finding a parking spot could be a challenge in the vibrant commercial center where meters had appetites larger than sharks for raw meat. He squeezed the Volvo between a BMW 7 Series and a Mercedes 500 in front of the Fitz Randolph Gateway. Joe removed a manila envelope from under the passenger seat, grabbed the five-iron, and checked the traffic in the side mirror. With his leg barking, he stepped on the sidewalk. Standing under the famed arch of the university, Joe waited for the traffic light to change. He closed his eyes, visualizing Preston meeting Clark Johnson at the Balt across the street. The rustle of feet brought him back. A sub shop occupied the former landmark's space.

Joe crossed to the south side of the street, turned west and headed toward Palmer Square following the steps Preston and Clark took to Breslow's

cleaners. The news kiosk on the corner was doing a brisk business. *The New York Times'* lead story—"Bush Readies Transition Team As Democrats Ready Appeal to Supreme Court."

"Good luck," Joe mumbled, "about the same chance as the Jews on the *St. Louis* had appealing for a country to take them."

"Excuse me?" said the Indian proprietor.

"Talking to myself," Joe said, popping fifty cents on the counter.

Joe trudged past The Princeton Inn. To his surprise, Breslow's was still in business. He crossed the street to peek through the window. Than, the Vietnamese proprietor, was behind the computerized register taking payment from a black customer. Many things had changed over the sixty-two years since Preston brought his mustard stained pants into the shop, one thing hadn't—the orange tape measure hanging around Than's neck. Joe was tempted to ask if the tape measure came with the business.

Joe paused at the wrought iron gate bordering the alley Preston ventured into looking for Clark. A Fed Ex truck was making a delivery. He tossed the newspaper into a curbside trash receptacle then pushed the gate opened with his foot. Gone were the overflowing garbage cans. Asphalt replaced the decaying cobblestones. Joe, limping and dragging the five-iron, searched above the security doors. There it was—The Tiger's Claw mosaic. The receiving department of Anne's European Boutique occupied the space. A woman cutting up cardboard boxes on the cement step eyed Joe suspiciously. "Do you need help?" she asked.

"I was looking for the Tiger's Claw," Joe replied, repositioning the envelope under his arm. "A friend of mine spoke of it in glowing terms."

"Never heard of it." She placed the cardboard into a garbage dumpster, slamming the door behind her.

Joe massaged his calf. The fifty yards to the gate looked farther than when he entered. Sweating and with his heart pounding, Joe rested against a converted gaslight lamp post.

He crossed the street. The doorman at the inn welcomed him. "Happy hour in the lower bar. Best drinks in town."

"It's three o'clock," Joe laughed.

"But it's later somewhere else. Pass the front desk, short hallway to the right of the elevator bank," he said with a tip of his cap.

The lobby bustled with a bevy of Red Hat geriatric women leaving the hotel's restaurant. Joe sidestepped a baby stroller, turned right at the elevators, and proceeded toward the Wilson Room, named for Woodrow Wilson, past president of both the university and the country.

Despite the high marks from the doorman, the first floor saloon held but a handful of patrons. Three Red Hat ladies sat at a table tucked into a corner. Two middle aged suits were at the burlled bar in animated conversation. The blonde thirtyish female bartender refilled a bowl with salted peanuts that the two were eating with both hands. Two glasses stood before them.

Joe stepped into the room where George Washington had hoisted a stein of lager. The original pine paneling had long ago taken on a caramel patina. "Connie, two more," one of the suits said to the barkeep, a cigarette dangling from his lips.

Connie moved to the taps, sudsing two new glasses. She smiled at Joe, pointing to an empty seat at the far end of the bar. Joe winked back. The smell of beer and cigarettes attracted him like a magnet. Connie was an inducement he didn't need.

Joe took a deep breath. "Looking for a friend," he said, turning on his heels. The hall running parallel to the lobby led to the Bank Street side of the building. Joe pressed the "Emergency Only" lever on the door, stepping into the fading sun. Across the street, the renowned Gallup Organization occupied half the block from the not so famous *Princeton Gazette*.

The offices of the paper were ripped from a Dickens novel with the receptionist seated behind a desk located on a platform. The nameplate read Ms. Chandler. "As I live and breathe, how in the hell are you?" Francine said. Her porcine features and red-orange hair were startling. "You're not walking too bad for an invalid."

"Don't tell anyone," Joe whispered. The Man, if he finds out, could revoke my disability pay."

"My lips are sealed," Francine whispered back.

"Where's the boss?"

"Manny's in the morgue. I'll buzz him."

"Don't. I want to surprise him," Joe said. The repository for past issues was located in the rear of the building. A hallway to the right of the reception area was lined with framed front pages of papers published from

the 1860s. *The Gazette* had been a daily up to 1950 when competition from *The Trenton Chronicle* caused a change to a weekly edition. Offices for Manny, reporters, advertisement and layout broke off like spokes of a wheel.

A cacophony of hisses and thumps rattled behind a metal accordion gate where out of date presses struggled to print the week's issue. Joe circumvented rolls of paper stock. The morgue had been the supply room when lead type was set by hand.

Joe rapped twice on the door frame with the five-iron. "Doughnuts!" he growled to the gray haired pudgy figure looking at a microfilm viewer situated on a battled scared gray metal desk.

Manny's beige neck support limited his mobility. He swiveled to face Joe. "If I knew you were coming, I would've..."

"Laced a cake with arsenic," Joe said, stepping into the blue tinged light of the overhead fluorescent bulbs. A mish-mash of file cabinets labeled by year lined the windowless walls. Newspapers not converted to microfilm were stacked on top.

"I would've been out," Manny snarled.

Joe knew what was coming. How he didn't return calls or e-mails. "I was in a bad place." He tucked the envelope under his arm. "I was in town and thought it was time to say that I no longer hold you responsible for ruining my life."

"That's big of you. I always said you're one heck of a guy." Manny understood Joe's demented sense of humor and his pride. "What's happening with Elaine?"

"Arizona agrees with her so much that she ain't coming back," Joe said with a faint smile.

Manny stood, giving Joe a hug. "What can I say?"

"Don't feel sorry for me. I'm having the time of my life." Joe sat on a folding chair at the side of the desk, placing the envelope on his lap. He kept a hand on the five-iron.

"How's the leg?" Manny asked, startled by the change in Joe's appearance

"Better than your neck. When are you going to retire the brace?"

"Probably about the same time you stop limping." Manny countered. "What's in the envelope?"

“Do you know Gloria Johnson?”

“Since I was a cub reporter,” Manny replied, eyeing Joe warily. “Why do you ask?”

Joe leaned on the five-iron. “How about her husband Clark?”

Manny adjusted his neck support. “I was with him the night he died.”

“I was told he died suddenly,” Joe said. “From what?”

Manny returned to the viewer. “There it is. A writer doing a piece on old Princeton requested an article from the 1930s.” A printer on the side of the desk whirred. He removed the spool returned it to its storage box. “Clark Johnson died of lead poisoning.”

“Something like that takes years,” Joe said, shifting on the chair. “Painful.”

“His was quick and painless. Clark took a .38 slug to his chest. Never knew what hit him. I was there.” Manny wasn’t smiling. “Again, I pose the same question, why do you ask?”

“When the old pain in the ass across the street from me croaked, I acquired his personal papers.” Joe handed Manny the envelope.

Manny undid the clasp on the oversized envelope, sliding the contents onto the desk. He skimmed the first pages of each diary. “Two different hands.”

“Very astute. The leather bound were written by my nemesis. Put your Evelyn Wood speed reading skill to use,” Joe said, propping his leg on a stack of old telephone books as Manny’s finger cruised down the diary pages. “I’ll relax for a while,”

After fifty minutes and three trips to the sidewalk by Joe for a nicotine recharge, the publisher of the *Gazette* finished. “Incredible stuff if they’re true,” Manny said, rubbing his neck.

“Why wouldn’t they be?”

“For starters, I’ve never heard of any underground Jewish defense organization operating in the United States before World War Two,” Manny said, flipping through one of Preston’s diaries.

“Doesn’t mean it didn’t exist,” Joe chafed. “I’m not surprised that someone drilled Clark. Enlighten me.”

“I came to work here in 1959. Single, with not many choices to go after work in those days, I hung out at Jensen’s Roadhouse, a joint on the outskirts of town. Clark was a regular. I came to know the guy who, if it was

possible, was viler than in these pages.” Manny held up one of Preston’s diaries. “When he had a snoot on, the most hateful things flowed out of his mouth.”

Manny rolled the chair to a file cabinet, returning the box to its proper place. He scooted four files to his right. “Here’s the microfilm for the week Clark died.” Threading the film in the viewer, he said, “Read.”

Joe moved his chair to face the screen.

Manny continued, “July 9, 1960. I remember it like it was yesterday. It was a Tuesday night, hot as hell. Clark was on *his* stool. If the bar was a football field, his spot was on the fifty yard line. He had a repertoire of obscene jokes and was in the middle of his routine when Ellis Price walked in.”

“Ellis Price from Preston and Clark’s dormitory?” Joe asked, lighting a cigarette.

Manny slid a metal garbage wastebasket toward Joe. Pointing to the “No Smoking” sign would’ve been futile. “The one and the same.” He took a bite of a jelly doughnut wrapped in a napkin that looked as if it was used to clean the concrete floor. “Price sits to Clark’s right in a spot near the end of the bar and Clark comments about his suit.”

“I got the idea that Price was on the prissy side,” Joe said, scrolling the pages.

Manny wiped his mouth with the napkin. “Price was on the effeminate side. He orders a drink and things settled down until Ellis yells at Clark, ‘You had to come back.’ He got off his stool, slapped two dollars on the bar, and walks up to Clark. In one motion, he pulls a pistol out of his jacket pocket and fires one shot into Clark’s chest. Glasses, peanuts and ashtrays went flying as Clark fell off his stool. Like nothing happened, Price walked away.”

“Nobody tried to grab him?” Joe asked.

“It was such a shock. Besides, Price had a gun. After five or ten seconds, all hell broke loose. Price raced to the parking lot and hightailed it away.”

“This article doesn’t mention half of what you’re telling me,” Joe said, shaking his head.

“Not exactly Pulitzer Prize material is it?” Manny chortled. “It was and still is a family paper.”

Joe continued to scroll down. "Jesus Christ. He committed suicide in a park three blocks away?"

"In the section that was known to be a gay pickup spot." Manny said. "There's something else."

Joe tapped his cigarette against the wastebasket. "Pray tell."

"A guy at the end of the bar where Price sat called himself Ted Steele."

"How big?"

Manny took a slurp of his coffee. "The guy was a monster. Six-five, Six-six and a good two sixty. He started coming in a few of months before Clark's murder. I spoke to him a couple of times, said he did business in Philly on Tuesdays and stopped on his way home."

"Clark was a Tuesday regular?"

Manny thought for a moment. "Yeah. A lotta nights he was at his old eating club on campus. The guy wanted to relive his college years."

"Sounds like Jake Rothstein made it a point to be there when Clark was sure to be in attendance."

"His name really could've been Ted Steele. It's possible." Manny clasped his hands behind his head. "After Clark's death, Ted Steele no longer came into Jensen's."

"And maybe the guy lost his job or was too frightened by Clark's murder to go back to Jensen's." Joe said with a chuckle. "What about Gloria?"

"You paid her a visit before coming here, right? I'm surprised she agreed to talk about Clark."

"I can't tell a lie," Joe said with a grin. "I told her I was an author writing a book about the members of the isolationist movement who became good soldiers. She went on a rant how the Nazi loving bastards were treated badly. She's still burning a candle for Charles Lindbergh. After agreeing with her, she let me into Clark's den that she's maintained exactly as it was the day he died. I got a good look at his flight logbook."

"I've come to know her well over the many years. She's a tireless worker for countless organizations, including the Jewish Center. One classy lady."

"She had something in common with Preston Swedge. He became a big-time donator to the Westfield temple." Joe took a sip of Manny's coffee.

"Help yourself," Manny said.

"Mrs. Johnson kicked me out after doing a web search on me." Joe showed Manny the photo of Paul Rothstein. "I showed her Rothstein's

picture and drew a blank response. She claimed she never heard of him, but Reverend Miller, Preston Swedge's minister, the gent who gave me her address, was in her company when Clark toasted the dead airman." Joe wagged his finger. "She knows what happened to Rothstein. I'd bet your pecker on it."

"And Jake Rothstein was stalking Clark because he had something to do with his brother's death."

"Something like that," Joe said with a wave of his hand. "Clark came from Michigan. Why did he return to Princeton?"

Manny shut off the viewer. "Clark followed his father's footsteps and worked for Ford. After stints in Michigan, Kansas City and Atlanta, he was transferred to run the Edison plant. If you had a choice, would you live in Edison when you could easily afford Princeton?"

"You have a point. Clark's been dead for forty years and his widow is still living large," Joe said. "How does she do it?"

"Gloria has been living off of Clark's trust fund, life insurance and inheritance. She's protective of the Johnson family name." Manny stood. "I wouldn't want to see her or her son Brad hurt if Clark's dirty linen is thrown onto the street."

Joe returned the diaries to the envelope. "Being married to Clark Johnson, she earned every dime, and it should be punishment for a lifetime. But..."

"But what?" Manny asked tensely.

"I found a map among Swedge's papers that detailed the route bombers took from their base in Italy. The mission took them over Auschwitz to a target four miles away. If I'm right, Clark Johnson was part of a plot to prevent Paul Rothstein from knocking out the gas chambers. Three hundred thousand Hungarian Jews died after August 20, 1944. What about their laundry they left behind as they walked naked to their deaths?"

Manny looked at the ceiling. "My grandparents were among the last Hungarian Jews deported from Budapest."

Chapter 28

WESTFIELD, NJ NOVEMBER 2000

PAUL ROTHSTEIN REMAINED AS ELUSIVE as a wisp of smoke. Joe reasoned if Preston graduated Princeton in 1942, Rothstein graduated from New York University in the same year.

Kopel Weinstein, uncle to Mel Katz and one of Joe's golfing buddies, went to the N.Y.U. School of Commerce, graduating in 1942. With a campus population of ten thousand, Joe knew it was a long shot that Kopel or his wife Naomi, also a '42 graduate, but of the School of Education, had any dealings with Paul Rothstein or Dave Cohen.

The Weinstains loved dogs and had made a fuss over Roxy since she was a pup. Joe snapped a leash on the Labrador. "Between your lovely face and this coffee cake, we'll soften them up. The old folks will be talking up a storm."

He let Roxy out. She ran down the front steps with her nose to the ground, passed the Volvo, and then raced around the side of the house to the backyard gate. Joe checked the street in both directions. Looking for the white compact had become another addiction. Agitated, Roxy galloped back to the driveway. "The 'bad' man again? Come on Roxy, tell me where can I find him." He put the bakery box onto the passenger seat.

Joe followed Roxy to the gate where the dog danced in anticipation. Joe reached for the latch. "Get him!" he said, putting a shoulder to the cedar slats. Bursting into the yard, the ninety pound cookie killer stopped in her tracks, growled at a squirrel foraging in the decaying tree stump in the far corner, and then looked at Joe. "The 'bad' man isn't here. Let's go."

Disappointed, Roxy slinked back to the Volvo. "You'll get another go at him." Joe said, opening the rear hatch.

Cruising through the center of town, Joe detoured to Elm Street, double parking outside Basics and Bras. Kim scrambled out of the small shop at the sight of the white Volvo. Joe rolled down the passenger window. "I have a craving for Italian. How about I pick you up at six?"

"Make it five-thirty. It'll give us more time to watch PBS after dinner," she said with a wink. Joe hated PBS and NPR radio—his tax dollars weren't meant to support socialist propaganda. He held his hands over his heart. "I'll be in pain until then." He watched the complete package return to the sales desk.

The Westfield Senior Citizen Complex, located a good tee-shot and three-wood from the OptimaCare Center, was a pair of ten story buildings, ill designed and looking more decrepit than their thirty years. Joe parked in the designated fire lane of building One, putting his W.P.D. credentials on the dashboard. He searched the mess in the console between the front seats, coming up with a pair of wrap-around sunglasses. A sign next to the main entrance warned that only service dogs were permitted. Taking the coffee cake and five-iron, he maneuvered to the rear of the station wagon and opened the hatch. Despite not having visited the Weinstains for close to a year, Roxy bolted for the door. Naomi's unlimited supply of dog treats was ingrained on her brain. Inside the vestibule, Joe pressed the intercom key for 8D.

"Who is it?" Naomi crackled.

"Judge Crater."

"Joe Henderson, I could give you the beating of your life." The electronic lock buzzed.

Joe crossed the lobby with Roxy in tow. One elevator was out of service, the other stuck on floor eight. Roxy sat at the elevator, her tail swishing against the aquamarine tile floor. Taking the stairs was out of the question. A bench and four chairs had been stolen and hadn't been replaced. Joe rested against an eight foot turkey erected for Thanksgiving. The red lights began to move on the overhead indicator. Joe counted down the floors,

“Three, two, one—the eagle has landed.” The elevator door slid open. An EMS crew hovered over a woman hooked to an oxygen tank, her complexion the color of day-old oatmeal. “Lieutenant, have you gotten the flies out of your hair?” asked one of the paramedics who had been at Preston’s house the day his body was found.

Joe pulled Roxy out of the way. “I got that fly, but I think one crawled up you know where.”

The old lady moaned, trying to remove the mask over her nose. “Maybe you should seek professional help,” the uniformed medical wise guy offered.

“I have, but the girl got busted,” Joe laughed. The trio moved away.

Joe and Roxy got on the elevator. In a series of fits and starts, the Otis model 1970 made it to the eighth floor. Once lily-white, the senior towers were a cross section of the United Nations. When applications from town residents fell precipitously in the 1990s, the rolls were opened to non-residents. An ambient temperature mimicking the Amazon acted as a catalyst to turn essences of curry and kimchi to lethal weapons. Joe tried to hold his breath as he limped toward the end of the hall.

Roxy’s tongue assumed its August position, drooping to the floor. Panting, she pawed the metal door, flaking chips of yellow paint onto the soiled blue carpet. Joe pressed the chime. Naomi Weinstein, wheelchair bound, answered the door. “Let me guess. You’re Ray Charles,” Naomi said. She didn’t wait for Joe’s answer, turning to Roxy. “My special friend, I’ve missed you.”

Roxy licked Naomi on her cheek. The three-room, postage stamp size apartment was adorned with prints of horseracing greats. Naomi could cite chapter and verse from *The Daily Racing Form*. A series of portraits memorializing the Weinstein’s departed Corgis were prominently on display.

“I’ve missed you,” Joe said, bending to give Naomi a kiss. He deposited the cake in her lap.

“You’re a shit, but I missed you, too.” She grabbed him around the neck.

“Where’s the big guy?” Joe asked.

“On his throne in the living room. Kope, we have a visitor!” she yelled from the hall.

“Is that Joe?” Kopel asked from his recliner, unable to see more than a few inches past his nose. A combination of macula degeneration and glaucoma robbed him of the ability to read. Television was reduced to figures in a gray haze.

“Yeah, Kope. It’s me.”

Roxy raced down the short hall that opened to a living room/dining area crammed with possessions moved from a home they occupied for four decades. She cut around a wingback chair, hurtling into Kopel, knocking an extinguished half-smoked cigar from his mouth. The old man rubbed her head. “Mel told us you broke out of your cocoon. If I knew you were coming, I would’ve dressed for the occasion.” Kopel was still in a pajama bottom and T-shirt. Electronic digital vision enhancing goggles were balanced on his nose.

“You look very debonair,” Joe said, picking the stogie off the floor. “Do the new cheaters help?” An arc welder could have used the contraption.

“Barely, but any change is better than none,” Kopel said. “Amy, how about some coffee.”

“I’ve got it covered. Come to the table,” she yelled from the kitchen.

Joe led Kopel to his chair at the mission style dinette. “Amy, I’ll give you a hand,”

“To hell you will, sit down,” Naomi ordered.

Joe did as told, hanging his Yankee baseball jacket on the back of the chair. He was amazed that Naomi was able to take care of the both of them. Roxy trailed Naomi as she maneuvered her wheelchair around the galley kitchen while balancing a tray laden with a coffee carafe, three mugs, plates and utensils. She positioned the wheelchair at the end of the table. A ledge four inches lower than the table top allowed her to sit in her wheelchair and eat without reaching for her plate.

“Did you go to the Series?” Kopel asked. Kopel shared two of Joe’s passions— the New York Yankees and golf. “I watched the games on the radio.”

“Beating the Mets was never in doubt,” Joe said. “As Casey used to say, the boys done good.”

“Mel said you were asking about our graduating from N.Y.U. in 1942,” Naomi said, pouring the coffee. She handed Joe two mugs. Black coffee was the rule of the house. Naomi considered putting anything into the beans

sent by God, sacrilegious. “You working on a case?” Homebound, she devoured mystery novels to kill the time. Dick Francis and his racetrack novels were on top of her list.

Joe put one of the mugs in front of Kopel, bringing his hand to the mug’s handle. “A diary has come into my possession. I’m fairly certain that the writer graduated from N.Y.U. in 1942. Maybe you knew him.”

“Years ago when I could get around, I found a signed 1942 yearbook at a garage sale,” Naomi said, placing slice of cake on glass plates. She handed the desserts to Joe. “I didn’t know the guy.”

As he did with the coffee, Joe placed the cake before Kopel then handed him a fork. “Cake is in front of you.” He fished Rothstein’s photo from his shirt pocket, handing it to Naomi.

Naomi sat looking at the face. Without turning the photo over she said, “Paul Rothstein. He was one of Kope’s friends. It’s been so many years since I thought about him.”

Kopel struggled with his cake, scattering the powdered topping on the tablecloth. “I sat next to him in most of my accounting classes,” he said, managing to snare a piece. “Thirty-two of my classmates died in the war. Paul was one of them.”

“Old diaries are a dime a dozen. Every estate sale has one,” Naomi said. “This is part of a case. I knew it.”

“I’m retired. This is a personal project,” Joe said, sipping his coffee. “From his diaries, Paul sounds like a great guy who came from a tight knit family. Can you tell me about him?”

“I came to know Paul pretty well from being in many of the same courses,” Kopel said without hesitation. “His family was dirt poor, and if it weren’t for his older brother, he couldn’t have paid the tuition. He was sharp, with a knack for math, far better than I. He married a gal right after graduation, before he went into the service. Naomi and I did the same. Now I am stumped. Amy, do you remember her name?”

“Sure, her name was Sarah Greenbaum. In fact, she was in a few of my classes, a real sweet kid. They were really in love, an item almost from the beginning of our freshman year.” She rolled away from the table. “I’ll be right back.”

“His Brooklyn accent still rings in my ears,” Kopel said, closing his eyes. “Paul was concerned about what was going on in Europe, far more than I

was. I'm talking about 1938. I only knew of the Nazis from what I read in the papers."

"I thought that the Nazis were everybody's concern," Joe said.

Naomi returned with their N.Y.U. yearbook opened to Paul Rothstein's picture. "That's not the way it was," Naomi said. "I'm not just talking about the non-Jews. On the whole, the Jewish students weren't concerned about what was happening in Europe. When the Germans took over the Czechs, there wasn't much of a reaction. I remember how Paul was upset. He couldn't understand why Jewish students weren't worried about Hitler. Am I correct about that Kope?"

"To us, Hitler was a distant problem," Kopel said. "I remember when *Kristalnacht*, the night of broken glass, happened. There wasn't much reaction even in New York to the Nazis breaking the windows of every Jewish business and burning down synagogues. Paul came to school more agitated than ever."

"I find it hard to believe that American Jews sat on their collective asses as the Nazis were killing their European brothers. Weren't there any Jewish student organizations on campus that organized a response to at least throw rocks at the German embassy?" Joe asked.

Kopel continued to fish among the crumbs on his plate. "There weren't any organized Jewish groups per say. It was 1938, not 1968. *You* people of the sixties have a different set of values, taking on the government over Vietnam. We didn't think about doing anything like that in 1938. Besides, the Jewish population wasn't so much concerned with the Nazis, as being labeled communists."

"No protests, no nothing," Joe said with a wave of his hand. "What about Father Charles Coughlin? He was a Jew hater right here in this country."

"We didn't listen to his program," Kopel said.

"There wasn't much talk about the German Jews in the synagogue that my family attended," Naomi said, cutting another piece of cake. "Where I lived in the Bronx, you just didn't talk about it. When I look back, I can't believe we were so indifferent to what was going on, and what would happen. Roosevelt was supposed to know more than we did and do what was correct."

They sat drinking their coffee. "There's a long entry in Paul's diary that tells of Sarah's cousin being rescued from the ship the *St. Louis*."

“Sarah was also from the Bronx. As an only child, she was extremely close to her parents,” Naomi said.

Naomi slipped a piece of cake under the table to Roxy. “One day, Sarah comes to school all excited. Mail from Germany took weeks, and the Greenbaums received the news just days before the ship was to dock in Havana. But within a few days, her euphoria turned to despair. I can still see her crying, telling us her cousin was going to be sent back to Germany to end up in a concentration camp.”

After nearly sixty years, Naomi and Kopel could complete each other’s sentences, Kopel continued, “We were going into the exam period when Paul said he had to go to Miami. No one I knew had ever been farther than Atlantic City. Naturally we were curious, and the more we asked, the more convoluted were the answers.”

“What did Sarah have to say?” Joe asked.

“Nothing. She disappeared along with Paul,” Naomi said.

“The history books say nobody got off that ship. Her cousin Minnah didn’t drop from the sky. Paul later admitted his brother Jake pulled some strings to have the girl released.” Kopel said.

“When did you find out that Paul died?” Joe asked.

“I followed Kope to Fort Knox where I got a job on the base. We were married before Kope went into the army as did Paul and Sarah. When we came back in the fall of 1945, we heard Paul had been killed in action. I tried to get in touch with Sarah, but could never locate her. The Rothstein’s moved from Brooklyn. She vanished without a trace,” Naomi said.

“None of your friends had any information?” Joe asked.

Kopel seemed a little perturbed. “We came home from the service after almost three years. We had to get on with our lives, and the first order of business was to get a job. I don’t think that we found out about his death for seven or eight months.”

“And that was by chance. We bumped into Paul’s best friend Dave Cohen in of all places, Times Square,” Naomi said.

“Dave didn’t have many details, just that Paul’s plane was shot down,” Kopel said.

“Did he say where he went down?” Joe asked.

“Somewhere over Poland. Paul was gone, what difference did it make where he went down.” Kopel said. “Dave was always rushing someplace

even when we were in school. That day was no different. He was gone in a flash. We haven't seen him since."

Naomi flipped the yearbook pages to Dave Cohen's picture. "Dave was a real character." She handed Joe the book.

"Is Dave Cohen still alive?" Joe asked. The notation under the picture said "Lawyer to Be."

"Funny you should ask," Naomi said. "We received an alumni bulletin last week and it mentioned he received a life achievement award for community service in Westchester. It's under the *Time* magazine on the counter behind you. His picture is in the last few pages."

Joe retrieved the bulletin. Cohen's picture was taken at a Marriott hotel. The company's logo was on the draperies behind the dais. A brief bio listed Dave's awards and kudos for fifty years of being a C.P.A. "What about Jake Rothstein?"

"Give me two fingers more of coffee." Kopel handed Joe his mug. "His picture was in the papers."

Joe filled the mug, handing it back to Kopel. "Something about a murder. I can't remember the details," Kopel said.

"When?" Joe asked.

"Amy?" Kopel said.

"1946 or '47. Jake Rothstein was a gangster. Killed a guy for not paying up what he owed to a loan shark. He went away for a long time." Naomi said.

Roxy stared at Joe, then walked down the hall to the door. "Do you mind if I borrow this?" he asked, holding up the bulletin.

"One less thing to throw out," Naomi said. "Paul Rothstein is more than a curiosity for you. You're working on a case. I can read you like a book. Promise me you'll tell me what happened to Sarah."

"Everyone reads me like a book." Joe gave Naomi a kiss. "I'll be back, sweetheart," he said in his best Bogart impersonation.

Chapter 29

WESTFIELD, NJ NOVEMBER 2000

“COMING TO THE LIBRARY IS NOT A DATE,” Alenia protested. “We haven’t been together for a week and you bring me here.” She turned heads in her black cashmere sweater, diverting eyes from books and newspapers in the research section of the Westfield library.

This was Joe’s second trip in as many days. His searches through archived issues of *The New York Times* for articles about Jake Rothstein’s legal troubles had been fruitless. “I need help. If you love somebody, it doesn’t matter where you are.” He batted his eyes like Groucho Marx. From a file cabinet, he removed a reel of microfilm marked January-June 1948.

“What are these films?” Alenia asked. “Motion pictures?”

Joe threaded the film into the viewer, pressing the forward button. The front page of January 1, 1948 began to scroll. “Each frame is a page of the newspaper.”

“I don’t understand,” Alenia said. “This is ancient history.”

“I always tell you that you’re as smart as you are beautiful,” Joe said, giving her a kiss. “I want you to look for the ‘bad’ man.”

Alenia squirmed on the hardwood seat. “The man who tried to break into the house?”

Joe stopped the film at January 20th. “I don’t know if you’ll see his face. I’ll settle for his name—Jacob Rothstein or Ted Steele.”

“He’s brother of the soldier in the picture from the old man Swedge?” Alenia asked.

“That’s correct. You keep reading. I’m going to look at the second half of 1948.”

"These prices, I can't believe. Ladies skirt two dollars, ninety eight cents," Alenia read. "*Ritz* crackers, twenty-one cents."

"A man made twenty-five dollars a week," Joe said. "Everything is relative."

"Big bargains, no Rothstein," Alenia said. "I don't understand why you're wasting time. Even if you find out what Swedge was doing, what he was hiding all years, nothing changes. You can't bring back the dead."

Joe fast forwarded through the want-ads of September 5, 1948. "America is supposed to be the liberator of the oppressed and the champion of the downtrodden."

"Governments are all the same," Alenia spat.

"I hate Russian philosophers," Joe said, thinking that the retired exotic dancer was correct. "Shut up and keep reading."

"Stalin," Alenia said, pointing to the dictator's picture on the screen. The connected article concerned Soviet domination of Poland and Hungary. "The West did nothing to stop him. Maybe Swedge had his hand in that too."

Joe loaded 1949. "Preston was many things, but a commie-pinko, I doubt it."

"Nich-o-las Spag-no-la," Alenia said, twirling a lock of hair.

Joe spun toward Alenia's screen. March 23, 1948. He read, "Nicholas Spagnola and Jacob Rothstein were sentenced by Judge Marvin Hirschhorn to twenty years for the murder of Mordecai Stein. Their attorney, former Congressman Benjamin Goodman, said he would appeal immediately."

"This is what we're wasting our time?" Alenia asked.

"I think so." Joe continued to read. "Stein, owner of a business in the Manhattan garment center, fell out of an eighth floor window during a fight with Rothstein and Spagnola. The duo with known connections to waterfront boss and loan shark Thomas Bavosa paid a visit to Stein to collect on a loan that had fallen in arrears. The jury deliberated for just half an hour, convicting the defendants on the testimony of Selma Stein who referred to Rothstein by his alias Ted Steele as the one who had beaten her husband with a baseball bat three months prior."

"Jesus Christ!" Joe said. "If Rothstein did the minimum time he could have been paroled in 1960." He stared at the article. "1960 is when he surfaced in Princeton and when Preston had his nervous breakdown."

Alenia smoothed a nail with an emery board fetched from her Louis Vitton bag. “Now can we go?”

Joe made a copy of the *Times* article. “In a minute,” he said, flipping open his cell phone. It was a few minutes to eleven. Stored in his contact list was the number for David Cohen. The phone rang twice.

“This is your fourth call to my number,” the craggy voice answered.

Joe envisioned the eighty-plus accountant sitting at his kitchen table with the paper and a tall glass of prune juice. Joe said the magic words, “Ted Steele.” There was dead silence. Joe waited for the sound of Cohen’s dentures hitting the floor.

“I have business in the city and will be free by twelve-thirty. Do you know the General Motors building?” Cohen asked sarcastically.

Joe twisted his tongue holding back the F bomb. “Fifty-eighth and Fifth, across from the Plaza.”

“There’s a coffee shop on Fifty-eighth—Blintz. Be there.”

Cohen was gone, no good-bye not even a drop dead. Joe looked to see if the call was dropped. “Let’s go into the city.”

“Harry will be back by seven. Okay, we go.” Alenia ran her hands over her chest, drawing an ogle from a senior citizen who wandered into the archive room. “We’ll have fun.”



Cajoled into driving, Alenia maneuvered the Mercedes along the New Jersey Turnpike, weaving between ten wheelers to maintain a steady seventy. With the morning crush long over, they zipped through the Lincoln Tunnel.

“Harry took me to the Plaza when we first met,” Alenia said, pulling into a parking garage adjacent to the hotel. She handed the attendant a twenty. “Keep the car on *this* level. I don’t want to wait an hour when we return.”

Joe smiled. The girl had learned the value of money from Harry. “I’ll call you when I’m finished. Give Harry a break and don’t buy out Bergdorf Goodman’s.”

“I’m going to replace the bra your dog ripped apart,” she said with a snarl. “Give me a kiss.”

Joe planted a light smoochie on her cheek, avoiding the red gloss that accentuated her lips. Painstakingly climbing the ramp to Fifty-eighth Street, he turned right for Fifth Avenue. Across the street, a line stretched from the F.A.O. Schwartz toy store located on the ground floor of the General Motors building. A banner hanging above its door announced the rollout of the latest video game Joe never heard of.

Following the stream of pedestrians crossing to the east side of Fifth, Joe bypassed the video queue. Blintz was four doors down. Despite Alenia’s race driving skill, he was fifteen minutes late.

The Greek run breakfast-lunch bistro was narrow as a submarine. Third in line to be seated behind two couples and a woman balancing a hatbox and a large brown shopping paper bag from Macy’s, Joe studied the faces of the diners. None came close to the picture of Dave Cohen clipped from the N.Y.U. alumni newsletter.

“Looking for someone?” the slender olive skin cashier asked, chomping on her chewing gum. A red stripe highlighted a head of bleached blonde spiked hair.

Joe showed her Cohen’s picture. “Supposed to meet the man for lunch.”

“You a cop?”

“Not after a perp tried to blow off my leg,” Joe said, leaning on the five-iron.

She pointed to the rear. “Last row of tables.”

With tables crammed inches apart, Joe turned sideways to make it through the aisle without knocking coffee cups off the tables. Cohen sat with his back to the wall. “Mr. Cohen.”

Cohen hovered over a plate of eggs over-easy and a slice of whole-wheat toast. “I’m never late for appointments,” he said, pointing his fork.

Cohen was the epitome of an accountant: square black-rimmed glasses, navy shirt with contrasting blue tie, and conservative gray suit. Notwithstanding a bad comb over, Joe gauged that for a man his age, Cohen was in good shape. He put the alumni article on the table. “Congratulations. The Weinsteins send their regards.” He sat, hanging the five-iron on the edge of the red Formica table.

“My God!” Cohen said between chews. “It must be fifty years since I’ve seen them.”

“Times Square, 1945 to be exact. After not seeing your good friends for nearly three years, you couldn’t spare the time to talk. Ring a bell?” Joe said, pushing silverware toward the middle of the table.

Cohen put his fork down. “I don’t remember.”

Before Joe could utter “bullshit,” the waitress came by with a carafe of coffee and two cups. “Everything all right?” she asked Cohen.

Cohen didn’t answer, staring at the front of the room. “Everything is hunky-dory, but I could use a cup,” Joe replied. The girl poured the coffee and moved to her next station. “Ted Steele rang a bell this morning. Do you know where I can find him?”

The octogenarian came back to earth. He fiddled with his right ear. “Damn hearing aid picks up all the background noise. What were you asking?”

Joe wasn’t sure if Cohen was busting his chops or his hearing aid really wasn’t working properly. “Ted Steele.”

“Why the interest?” Cohen asked, finishing his eggs.

Joe wasn’t in the mood to play twenty questions. “I stumbled into some papers that included your friend Jake and his moniker Ted Steele.”

Cohen took a sip of coffee, then nonchalantly said, “I haven’t seen Jake since 1948 when he went to prison. After he was paroled, I heard he was killed somewhere out west.”

“When was that?”

“Sixty-two or sixty-three,” he mumbled.

Having interviewed more than a few suspects, Joe had a feel for scripted responses. Cohen was playing with him. Joe wanted to look under the table to see if his new best friend was holding a cheat sheet. “And you didn’t make arrangements to see him?”

“Why would I? It wouldn’t have looked good for me professionally to associate with a felon. I’m an accountant, not an attorney.”

The waitress returned with a fresh pot of coffee, topping off their cups. Joe poured a splash of milk into the coffee that had the density of roofing tar. “How did you end up in debits and credits? You were supposed to be an attorney?”

Cohen shrugged his shoulders. "Things changed after I came back from the army. I had a wife and son. Going back to school, even at night, would have been impossible."

"What about Sarah?" Joe asked, studying Cohen.

"The Weinstains really filled you in about the old crowd," Cohen mused. "When I got home at the end of 1945, she had moved upstate and I never saw her again. I heard she took ill and passed away a young woman. Tragic."

"You were Paul's best friend and you didn't want to know what happened to his widow?" Joe said, fixing Cohen with a glare. "What about Paul's parents?"

"Abe Rothstein passed shortly after Paul and I went into the service. Paul's mom didn't last long after his death."

"I thought all you guys were tight, the old neighborhood togetherness routine. Let's not forget about blowing up the Bund."

The color drained out of Cohen's face. He shot Joe a puzzled look. "The Weinstains weren't that close to me or Paul to know such things. Where did you get your information?"

The lunch crowd filtered back to work. The Blintz was now three-quarters empty. "I got it from Paul Rothstein's diary."

Cohen choked on a piece of toast. He drank half his coffee. "Paul's personal effects were sent home to his mother after he died in 1944."

"I hate to break the news to you," Joe said, lighting a cigarette. "I found his diary in a pile of trash at an estate sale."

"In Westfield?" Cohen cautiously asked.

Joe edged close to the table. "A matter of fact, it was."

"You don't seem the type to go to estate or garage sales." Cohen white-knuckled the spoon as he stirred his cup.

"I like silk underwear, too." Joe's smart-alecky comment didn't draw a blink.

Cohen drained his cup. He slammed a hand on the table. "I remember. Paul had a buddy in his unit who came from New Jersey. I'm at a loss for the name. Who owned the house?"

It was Joe's turn. They were in a chess match, each skirting the truth. Joe ran through the exchanges. Hitting Cohen with Jake's alias didn't compare to the effect of Paul's diary. "The house changed hands seven times after it

was built in the mid-1950s.” He considered making up a name, but didn’t. “Preston Swedge. Ever hear of him?”

Cohen unconsciously took a deep breath, eyes darting left to right. “No.” He pushed his plate to the middle of the table, unfolded his napkin, and then carefully wiped his mouth. “Paul was big on keeping a journal in college,” he paused. “I wonder if he kept one during his time in the service.”

Joe had gone to the Blintz with Jake Rothstein and or Ted Steele in mind, nothing more. Cohen had just put him on another track—there had to be more than one set of Rothstein diaries. His father’s words, uttered at his graduation from the police academy reverberated, “Never let up, keep punching the bastard in the ribs.” Joe kept punching, “Pretty amazing stuff. Paul Rothstein was a hero. I should have brought the four volumes, stupid me.”

“I have to use the facilities,” Cohen announced. “I’ll be right back.”

The rest rooms were located down a hallway out of Joe’s sightline. He checked his watch—ten minutes had passed. Cohen was about the same age as Joe’s father who needed time to do his business. At the fifteen minute mark, Joe became concerned, not over the possibility that Cohen had keeled over the bowl, but that he skipped out. Joe made a quick check of the men’s room. The pair of feet under the stall were wearing Nikes. Joe stuck Cohen’s picture in the face of a Latino busboy mopping the hallway. He pointed to the fire exit. Joe shouldered open the door to face a garbage dumpster in the alley running behind the building. Joe laughed. The old guy had stuck him with the check.

Chapter 30

WESTFIELD, NJ NOVEMBER 2000

“I THOUGHT AN AFTERNOON AT THE PLAZA would’ve gotten you in a better mood,” Alenia said, looking at Joe from the corner of her eye. The Mercedes sped through the E-Z pass lane in the New Jersey Turnpike interchange at Newark Airport.

“I was preoccupied,” Joe pouted.

Alenia switched lanes for Route 22. “I could’ve been with Harry.”

Joe opened the passenger window and lit a Marlboro. “It was the wine.”

Alenia laughed. “Maybe you have the diabetes like Harry.” She laughed again. “It’s alright Jozef. I’m used to old men.” She held out her hand palm up, indicating that she wanted Joe’s cigarette. “This Swedge business is driving you crazy.”

Joe handed her the cigarette, lighting another for himself. “There’s no way that Cohen doesn’t know what happened to Sarah Rothstein, and I don’t believe Jake Rothstein just up and went out west. The guy never ventured outside New York City.”

Alenia took a deep drag on the cigarette. “You’re being a schmuck.”

“I’m hearing Harry.”

Alenia zipped past the lake in Newark’s Weequahic Park. “Don’t you know someone in *the* secret police?”

“We don’t have *the* secret police in this country,” Joe said, flicking his cigarette out the window. “I know a guy in the FBI.”

Mimicking Joe, Alenia popped her cigarette out the driver’s window. “KGB, FBI same thing. If they want to arrest you, they arrest you. Your guy will find Sarah Rothstein and the bad man Jake. The KGB would have them in two hours.”

Hitting the power button on the fourteen speaker CD, Joe settled back, wrapping himself in the hand sewn leather. Classic rock and roll filled the cabin. "I used Ted Steele as bait for Dave Cohen, but he met me with an agenda. He was ready with his quips and attitude, but not for my possessing Paul's diaries. I'd bet the thing between my legs that Cohen knew they existed but was shocked that I have them."

"Why did he run away?" Alenia asked, pulling into Joe's driveway.

Joe looked at the Swedge house. "Cohen split when he figured I didn't have a second set of diaries." He got out of the car. "We're going across the street. They're in there someplace."

Alenia shook her head in the negative, rolling down her window. "Harry is coming home."

Joe removed two flashlights from the Volvo's trunk. "Let's go."

Sticking out her *tongue*, Alenia got out of the Mercedes. "It's getting dark. The house gives me the *villies*."

An orange plastic mesh fence surrounded the Swedge property. Joe helped Alenia step over the three feet high barrier. The couple rounded the curve behind the grove of evergreens. The house looked sad as it awaited its fate. A John Deere bulldozer was parked nose to nose with a dump truck. "They're going to bring the old girl down tomorrow. Let's go through the back door."

There wasn't any door. The inside of the house was painted in shadows. Preston's state-of-the-art 1950s kitchen had been stripped. Gaping holes were punched in the walls to strip the copper pipes.

"I feel ghosts," Alenia whispered. "Where do we start?"

"When in doubt, trust a hunch," Joe said, moving toward the basement steps. "The stuff that brought me into this puzzle was in the basement." He aimed his flashlight down the steps, freezing on the landing.

The cat urine smell was still present. "It stinks," Alenia said, squeezing next to Joe.

"Be careful! A few of the steps are loose," he warned, proceeding down. Sweeping the base of the steps with his flashlight, Joe stepped on the concrete floor.

The heating system had been removed, leaving a depression in the floor. Grease stains led across the room to the set of metal doors which opened to the rear yard. Disconnected air conduits hung from the floor joists like

curlers in a head of stick straight hair. Joe moved to the middle of the room trying to think like Preston.

Alenia slipped on the second to last step, almost landing on her rear. "Jozef!" she yelled, wiping cobwebs from her face.

"*Itsy bitsy spider*," Joe sang, crisscrossing the basement. "I don't think the opening has to be much larger than a notebook. The real estate people re-painted the basement. Try to find differences in the contours and colors."

"Everything's the same gray in this light," Alenia said, sweeping cobwebs away from her face. "I want to go home."

Light taps came from the kitchen floor above. "Sssh! Turn off your flashlight," Joe whispered. "Move to the back of the cellar."

"Jozef," Alenia whispered. "The bad man?"

Joe reached for his Glock secured in its shoulder holster beneath his sports jacket. Another step. He aimed the flashlight with his left hand, giving one pulse. Two yellow eyes reflected back. Joe turned the flashlight on. "It's Nelson, Ed Stoval's cat." Giving a sigh of relief, he returned the pistol to its holster. The twenty pound black and white tomcat slinked up the steps.

"He's smart. I want to go with him," Alenia said, breathing a sigh of relief. "Harry's going to be home soon."

Joe moved to the steps. "Six down, three across."

"Crossword puzzle. Jozef, you're crazy."

Joe tapped each step with the five-iron as he climbed. "It was on a scrap paper in Preston's satchel," he said from the landing. "Shine your light up here."

Alenia moved to the base of the steps, focusing the light at Joe's feet. "You're going to kill yourself."

"Six," Joe counted the steps as he descended. He swung the flashlight to his left. The beam caught nothing but floor joists. He turned to the wall to his right, moving for a closer look. The white painted plaster was intact.

"Jozef, there's nothing," Alenia said, climbing two steps. "The paper is junk like the bag."

Joe tapped the grip end of the five-iron on the wall. "Solid." He shifted three inches to the left, tapping twice. "Bingo, it's hollow." Using the blade end of the club, he smashed the wall, sending gypsum wallboard flying. He reached into the opening and took hold of the same type of twine that

secured the volumes found in the upstairs study. He held a bonanza of six books.

Alenia climbed the steps. “Those are your new girl friends,” she said. “You don’t need me anymore.”

Chapter 31

ITALY, JUNE 1944

STAZ DI AMENDOLA, TWELVE MILES NORTHEAST of Foggia, Italy was home to the 2nd Bombardment Group consisting of six squadrons, the 429th, 49th, 96th, and the 20th. A tent city had been hastily erected for its initial inhabitants in an olive grove in January 1944. Regular army barracks were planned, but five months later, the tents were still standing and would serve as homes for pilots and crewmen for the duration of the war.

Amendola was in constant motion. The airfield was shared with the 97th and a RAF unit that participated in British night raids. Two runways were laid just south of the hills where local shepherds grazed their sheep. Occasionally, wayward animals would stray onto the runways.

Before leaving the States, Second Lieutenant Paul Rothstein was counseled that he and the other replacements were going to be considered outsiders by a close knit fraternity which didn't accept newcomers until the pledge had passed the test. With the high rate of casualties, new men didn't last long. It was better not to get too friendly, friendships were hard to forget.

Paul was assigned quarters with three other pilots of the 20th squadron. Stenciled above the tent's canvas flap was *The Alamo*. It didn't take thirty seconds for Paul to figure out who was responsible for naming the digs. "Welcome to *The Alamo* and sunny Italy, it's sure nice to have company. Been kind of lonely around here for a couple of days. Take one of the empty cots, ain't anybody using them."

"Liquid sunshine," Paul quipped, shaking water off his rain poncho. Rolled mattresses on the three cots bore an ominous message. Paul evaded a kerosene lantern hooked to the center tent support and a coal burning

Franklin stoove to drop his duffle on a cot opposite Peterson's. The clapboard floor, resting on pilings driven into the mud, swayed with each step. G.I. olive-drab steamer trunks in front of each cot provided storage. "What happened to the previous renters?"

The slow Southern drawl belonged to First Lieutenant Shep Peterson of Lufkin, Texas. "Foley is in the hospital and is going to be sent home. Crane and Heeler went down in Romania two days ago."

Paul played with the mosquito netting suspended around the cot, wanting to take back the question. It was a rookie mistake. The cardinal rule was never to ask about the missing. He changed the subject. "Nice digs," he said, closing the lid on his trunk. "Uncle Sam sure knows how to spoil us."

"It isn't so bad, kinda reminds me of camping with my grand dad." The big Texan, six-one and two-twenty, took a liking to the kid with the funny Brooklyn accent. For Peterson, anyone not from Texas had a funny accent. "This is sure a first, a fly boy from Brooklyn and a Jew to boot," he whooped loudly. "I reckon you could use some chow."

Paul and the other replacements landed at Amendola just after the noon mess closed. The balance of the afternoon was spent processing interminable forms, taking an umpteenth medical exam, and a pep talk by the base commander. "My stomach is going to sue my mouth for non-support."

"Take off your gold bars so we can slip into the enlisted mess. The quartermaster there barter stuff with the locals—candy and smokes for fresh fruit and vegetables. The dumb ass who runs the officer's chow palace says he won't stoop to deal with the farmers around here."

A short walk of a hundred-fifty yards brought them into the mess and recreation areas. The common area was a sea of mud after three days of rain. "Be careful where you step," Peterson cautioned. "This Italian mud is unlike anything I've ever seen. Back home we have some ungodly earth when it gets soaked, but it doesn't compare. Shit, a five-ton truck will sink to its axles if it should run off the roads."

Peterson was correct about the enlisted men's mess. It was the best army chow Paul had eaten in months. "Put your bars back on, we're going to pay a visit to the officer's club. The guys spend down time in *The Cave*. I guess booze is more important than food, because the liquid served is *par excellence*." Peterson sidestepped a mud puddle. "Can't say enough about,

excuse the expression, Yankee ingenuity. The Italians have been mining limestone for centuries around here, leaving a slew of excavated caves. They've had various uses. The Italians used the caves as wine cellars, followed by the Germans who housed prisoners and horses. When we got our turn, Chaplain Allen saw their potential. He suggested converting them to enlisted men and officers clubs. Another was adapted into a theater for shows and movies. One of the sergeants hung the name *Rock Fella Social Center* on the theater. I kinda like it."

Paul followed Peterson into *The Cave*, which was cool as though it was air conditioned. A twenty-foot mahogany bar and twenty round banquet tables were liberated from a hotel destroyed in the ground fighting done by the grunts of the 5th Army. One of the replacement pilots held court in the far corner, regaling his new cohorts of his abilities with a B-17. "Who the hell is the hotshot?" Peterson asked. "He hasn't flown one mission and already considers himself top dog. Well, he's going to get his chance tomorrow. The weather guys say this rain is going to lift from here to Ploesti. We've been there three days in a row, and I doubt that we're going to get a break. Grab a seat, and I'll get a couple of beers."

Paul found a table with two vacant seats and introduced himself. Immediately he was asked about the new loudmouth. "That's Jake Graham. He's a legend in his own mind," Paul informed them.

Peterson returned with the brews. "I was telling my new tent mate that tomorrow his buddy over there is going to get his chance to shit his pants if we catch what they threw on the past three trips."

Ploesti, Romania, the main oil refinery servicing the Nazi war machine, was the third most heavily defended target on the continent, producing tremendous losses upon attacking formations of Fifteenth bombers. It was on these raids that the former residents of *The Alamo* were lost.

"Briefing at 04:30," Sergeant Barney Buckley yelled through the flap of *The Alamo*, shining his flashlight on the sleeping faces.

Sleep was difficult most nights for Paul. Before his first mission, it was impossible. He looked at the radium painted dial on his Hamilton—02:00. He hadn't caught more than two hours. The chatter among crews the previous night was Ploesti. A betting pool was giving 1:3 odds that it was still high on the target list. Thinking about flying into the man made Hell churned his stomach.

Peterson buried his head under his pillow. "I'd like to find the brain who ordered missions times before the roosters get up." He ripped the mosquito netting to the side, swinging his feet into his boots. "The target ain't going anywhere. It'll be there at 12:00."

Paul lit the kerosene lamp. "Make sure you have nothing on you except your dog tags," Peterson counseled. "They're going to check your pockets for personal stuff anyway, but you don't want to look like a rookie." The Texan tidied his cot, carefully tucking in the blanket. It was a ritual among pilots to make their beds, indicating their faith in returning from the mission.

Paul gamely followed suit. The two dressed in silence, hit the latrine and made their way to the officer's mess hall for the traditional pre-flight breakfast of eggs, flapjacks, and coffee strong enough to remove the corrosion on a propeller.

Conversations were short and muted. Paul barely choked down two forkfuls of eggs and a quarter mug of coffee. Getting sick wasn't an option.

Peterson worked on his second plate of eggs. "You better eat something. These missions keep gettin' longer and longer. Seven hours is a long time to go with nothing in your gut."

At 04:15, pilots, navigators, and bombardiers dumped their meal trays. Unrelated curses broke the silence of the pre-dawn quiet as the procession totaling ninety-six made its way to the mission briefing in a Quonset hut next to squadron headquarters.

A dozen six-by-sixes waited to take them to their planes. Peterson eyed his pasty looking tent-mate. "You worry me pardner. Not a good way to go into the wild blue yonder."

"I'll be alright," Paul said with a shrug as they filed through the entrance guarded by a pair of MPs.

"I'll see you after the briefing," Peterson said, joining his crew members.

Paul squeezed between his co-pilot Tom Hornish and his bombardier Monroe Ellington. Navigator Will Dalrymple nervously twirled a red grease pencil between his thumb and index finger. Captain Lindsey Bradford, the group's intelligence officer, stood at parade rest on a raised stage. Covered by a black sheet, a map detailing the route to the target challenged eyes that didn't want to look but couldn't resist.

Paul glanced around. Everyone sat at various positions and postures. Some were ramrod straight staring at the back of the heads in the row in front. Others had taken advantage of the lull by catching a few moments of sleep. The high octane coffee fueled sparse animated conversations between seatmates. He could feel the fear of death in the room.

"Ten-hut!" rang out. The assembly jump to its feet.

Colonel Raul Wullien, the Second's commanding officer and his adjutant, Major Austin Dexter, strode up the center isle to the stage.

Wullien spent his forty-seventh birthday writing letters to the families of crews lost in the raids against the dreaded Ploesti oil installations. The prematurely gray West Point graduate knew full well what his crews were being asked—fly the most advanced aircraft in the United State's arsenal with training that would have been laughed at prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. In 1938, the requirements to be a B-17 pilot were seven to eleven years of commissioned service, over 2,000 hours logged as a pilot, and ratings as a dead reckoning and celestial navigator, and to be an expert bombardier and gunner. By 1942, pilots with barely more than 200 hours of flying school time and less than one year of military service were moving directly into the B-17 cockpit and in one or two months were aircraft commanders. "Be seated," he ordered.

Armed with a clipboard, Dexter began roll call, calling the twenty-four names of each crew commander in alphabetical order. Paul felt his heart pounding through his shirt. "Rothstein!"

Paul's throat felt like a desert. He couldn't answer.

An Ace during the WWI, Dexter left his managerial position at U.S. Steel to regain his commission. His reputation of possessing a heart as cold and hard as the product made in the Pittsburgh plant followed to the 2nd Bombardment Group. "Rothstein!" he shouted, glowering at the neophyte pilot from New York.

Hornish tapped Paul on his knee. Paul stammered, "Pres-sent."

Dexter continued to stare at Paul, and then turned toward Wullien. "All present and accounted for."

Captain Terrance Flannery, a Boston cop in civilian life now serving as the group's security officer, stepped forward. "Do not talk about the mission once you've left this room, and this also applies to the scrubbed target. Make sure your dog tags are around your neck and your G.I. shoes are on your feet. Do not wear any insignia. Carry your name, rank and serial number, and no billfolds, pictures or letters. No one will be permitted to leave this briefing until dismissed."

With a magician's swoosh, Bradford removed the sheet. Red yarn pinned to the map stretched from Staz Di Amendola to Blechhammer, Germany. Groans and curses reverberated off the metal walls. The target wasn't Ploesti, but it was just as bad. "God-damn sonofabitch. This is my last mission," spat one of the pilots named Kranz. They'd been there before. The bombing result was poor; the enemy's resistance was deadly. Inside the hut, the temperature seemed to jump ten degrees. A faint haze rose to the ceiling produced from body heat and sweat.

Bradford flicked a wooden pointer at the map. Those lounging and daydreaming straightened on their chairs. Their lives depended on information from the thirty-something holding a doctorate in philosophy from Yale. "This is a deep penetration raid of seven-hundred fifty miles." A collective groan was emitted. The round trip would take a minimum of seven hours. Bradford paused, looking over his gold wire rims resting on the edge of his nose. "Flak should be light to the IP, then it will become real nasty. Enemy fighters will be numerous and fierce on both sides of the target. They will try to break up the formations with head-on attacks. Panicking and trying to evade them will leave you wide open for attack. If someone ahead gets out of the formation, move into his place. He's either hit and will go down or he's straggling."

"Peterson will lead the mission," Wullien announced, receiving the pointer from Bradford. He moved to the rear of the stage where a projector screen was lowered from the ceiling.

Paul glanced sideways at Hornish. They both knew that with Peterson leading the mission, the 20th squadron would be the first to get jumped by German fighters. It would be one hell of an initiation to combat.

“Slide,” Wullien ordered. An aerial surveillance photo of the target appeared. “The gas generators are your primary target,” he said, pointing to the towering structures. If destroyed, the plant will be inoperative for a minimum of six months and 250 tons of oil will be denied to the enemy. Our last trip to Blechhamer prepared us for today. Keep your wits about you. I can’t emphasize enough that maintaining group integrity is the key to staying alive. Good luck.”

The assembly snapped to attention. Wullien, Dexter, and Bradford stepped from the stage, exiting the hut without looking at the numb faces. The rows emptied into a quay plodding to the double doors opened by the MPs. Cigarettes were lit at the threshold, inhaled and finished in the one minute walk to a wood framed building housing the “ready room.”

Assigned lockers holding electrically heated flight suits, fleece lined leather jackets and gloves, and steel combat helmets were opened. Paul pulled a heavy woolen sweater over his head, fighting the worst thought that a pilot could have— who would be eating in the mess hall that night? He finished dressing. “Let’s go,” he said to his crew in a measured tone, determined not to ever repeat his bad showing in the briefing room.

A trail of emotions paved the way to the trucks. Paul jumped as a heavy hand landed on his shoulder. “It wasn’t pretty the first time we went to Blechhammer, but I’ll get you there and back,” Peterson said.

Paul managed a weak, “Sure thing.”

They climbed into the rear of a truck. The three mile trip to the airstrip passed in a blur. Dawn was peeking over the horizon. The sun would be up by the time the planes were cleared for takeoff.

Mechanics worked through the night preparing the planes for combat. Stopping at the edge of the airstrip made from steel mesh plates laid on grass and mud, the crews sprinted to their aircraft. Emblazoned across the nose of plane numbered 42-102908 was the *Brooklyn Avenger*. The seven crewmen searched Paul’s face for a hint of what lay in store.

Hornish said, “I’ll get the pre-flight checks going.” He disappeared through the lower hatch.

“Gather round and listen up,” Paul announced. “We’re going to Blechhammer, Germany.”

“Is that good or bad?” waist gunner Vincent Sapienza asked. Vinnie swapped his typewriter for a .50 caliber machine gun when one of the

Avenger's gunners fractured his arm before shipping out from the States. Paul questioned the fortuitous timing, sensing Jake's hand in placing the former Brooklyn enforcer in his crew.

"It's not Ploesti, but it isn't going to be a cakewalk," Paul said. Giving the details of the group's previous experience with the target wouldn't have boosted the crew's confidence. He handed his radioman Harold Jones the frequencies that were going to be used for the mission. "We've got a lot to do. Move!"

Paul circled the plane inspecting the tires, landing gear, and the external body. He pulled himself through the belly hatch and maneuvered along a six-inch wide walkway in the bomb bay and opened the door to the radio room. Jones, busy setting up his radios, didn't look away from his codebook. He entered the cockpit.

"Systems are a-okay," Hornish reported.

Paul eased into his seat. One-hundred fifty-six gauges and dials stared back from the instrument panel. "Let's run through the list." Pre-flight checks took an hour. He leaned out the slide window indicating that the plane be plugged into the external generator, the run up to starting the four engines. One of the maintenance crew stood behind engine Number One armed with a fire extinguisher. "Lt. Hornish, start Number One."

Hornish flipped a series of switches on the instrument panel then hit the start button. The three blade propeller at the end of the left wing began to spin. Two massive puffs of exhaust belched from the Pratt and Whitney turbocharged engine. "Oil and manifold pressures are satisfactory," Hornish said.

Paul flashed two fingers out the window. The fire extinguisher was moved to the second engine. "Start two."

With engines Number Three and Four running, the noise was so loud that it was hard for Paul to hear Hornish. He put on his headset, switching the intercom to the in-plane mode. "Vinnie. Flap check."

The right wing flaps were raised and lowered. "Ready, lieutenant," Vinnie replied.

Paul repeated the procedure for the left wing flaps. "We're ready to go."

A green flare broke the dawn. The ground crews removed wheel chocks up and down the line. Peterson's aircraft rolled from his station. Paul increased thrust on engines Two and Four. The *Brooklyn Avenger* taxied to

the runway. He touched the intercom. "Prepare for takeoff. Make sure everything is secured."

The B-17 immediately ahead lifted off. Paul opened the throttles on all four engines. The *Brooklyn Avenger* quickly picked up speed. Hornish called the M.P.H., "50, 60, 70...120."

Paul pulled back the yoke, barely clearing the trees at the end of the runway. "Landing gears up." Climbing to 5,000 feet, *The Brooklyn Avenger* joined the circling dance over Foggia as the 2nd Bombardment Group assembled into four squadrons. It was 06:30. Peterson began to climb.

At 28,000 feet, Paul set the trim tabs, reducing the strain on his legs and shoulders in keeping the plane level. He rolled a condom around the microphone in his oxygen mask to keep it dry. At altitude, the temperature inside the open plane plummeted to -50 Fahrenheit. He squeezed the mask to prevent ice from clogging it. "Clear your guns," he said. The report of the *Avenger's* fourteen machine guns cascaded into the cockpit.

"The sun is blinding. The German fighters are going to dive right out of it," Hornish said.

"They're the least of the problem. Flak over the refinery is so dense and accurate that Peterson says you can get out and take a walk on it," Paul said. To that point, the run was smoother than a training mission over South Dakota. "What's the ETA to the target," he asked Dalrymple.

"Thirty-four minutes, skipper."

"Bandits at two o'clock!" Vinnie crackled over the intercom.

The top turret and tail gunners yelled simultaneously about bogies and bad guys. Machine guns barked in sustained bursts. Hundreds of shell casings bounced on the floor and rolled around the fuselage. "Fighters in every direction!" Hornish yelled.

Forty to sixty Me-109s, FW-190s, and Me-120s attacked. 20mm German rounds split steel plate above Paul's head. The concussion of the exploding shells knocked his head to the side. Pressing his gloves against his ears, Paul tried to stop the ringing. For a moment he thought he would lose control of his bowels. He was in a world foreign to anything he trained for or ever experienced. Flashes of light twinkled a thousand yards in the distance. Cannon shells, aerial mines and rockets seemed to explode everywhere. "Conserve ammo, don't waste rounds," Paul ordered.

Two cracks in the windshield on Hornish's side of the cockpit appeared, coinciding with the co-pilot's steel helmet flying off his head. "Holy shit!" Hornish yelled, kicking at a baseball-size piece of metal lying on the floor.

A Me-109 closed to fifty yards of a B-17 monickered *Lovely Lady*, firing five bursts blowing a section off its tail. A second fighter fired a rocket into the midsection. "Get out! Get out!" Paul pleaded. Five parachutes fluffed into the sky forward of the bomb bay. He watched the bomber fall off to the left in a flat death-spiral spin. Maintaining tight formations was proving to be near impossible.

The surreal movie seemed to be playing in slow motion. It was if the *Avenger* was caught in aerial quicksand, slogging its way through steel splinters, fire, and red-hot chunks of metal. Pieces of wings, engines and tails disappeared. Paul wondered what was happening to the bodies riding in those planes.

"Fifteen minutes to the IP," Crawford crackled in Paul's ear. The IP was the initial point when the plane would begin its run to the target. It was the most helpless time for the pilot when the bombardier would be flying the aircraft from the bombsight and no evasive maneuvers could be made.

"*Old Willie* in trouble," Hornish said, pointing to a B-17 in the 429th squadron.

Paul swiveled his head to the left. The B-17 had opened its bomb bay doors and was salvoeing its bombs. Engine Number Four was on fire. "Horton's losing altitude." Anything that could be jettisoned to lighten the plane was thrown out of the waist doors. "He's doing a 180." Enemy fighters were moving in for the kill. "Where are our fighters?"

As fast as the attack began, the enemy fighters were gone. Blinding sun and the extreme cold were once again the enemy. The machine guns ceased firing. "Keep alert," Paul said calmly into his headset, belying his thumping heart. "It's a lull in the action."

In the distance, sharply rising black clouds rose over the target. "Smoke. They're obscuring the target," Paul said to Hornish.

Hornish pointed at the instrument panel. All the glass covering the gauges was cracked. The radio compass was shattered, and the other radios were hanging by their cables. "Everything is still working," he said, rubbing the spot on the side of his head where the large piece of shrapnel dented his helmet.

“Report damage,” Paul called through the intercom.

Holes large enough to put a hand through marked the fuselage. To Paul’s surprise, no one was seriously injured. Despite his admonishments, the gunners had burned up more than half their ammo.

Crawford’s voice broke the silence. “Five minutes to the IP.”

Black puffs appeared in the formation. Peterson’s warning was proving correct. German flak batteries were accurately throwing exploding shells into the formations. “Blechhamer is on the horizon, but the heavy smoke completely blocks it,” Paul said to Hornish. The passive German defensive technique had proved highly effective. Smoke pots were fired as soon as radar picked up the Fifteenth leaving their bases in Italy.

“I can’t see a thing,” Hornish replied with the smoke growing denser. “Not the ships on either side of us, or the flak.”

The *Avenger* bounced with each exploding German artillery shell. Pieces of shrapnel ricocheted around the cabin. Paul felt their heat as they passed his face. Voices poured over the intercom, making deciphering the messages difficult. “Clear the line,” he yelled. “I can’t understand what you guys are saying. You sound like a bunch of old women.”

Crawford broke in, “One minute to the IP.”

“The aircraft is yours,” Paul called to Ellington.

“Bomb bay doors opening,” Ellington replied, looking for his aiming point through the bombsight.

“Bogeys at three o’clock!” Vinnie screamed. The fighters were back, attacking in all directions. The Germans were breaking convention by putting themselves into the hell of the flak barrage.

“They’re defending the target at all costs,” Paul said to Hornish.

“B-17 going down,” Torkling, the tail gunner said. “The 96th is taking a beating.”

“Six bogeys at 11 o’clock!” Hornish screamed. The 20th was again the focus of the attack. “Kranz is in deep shit.”

Every gun on the *Avenger* was firing in support of *Boxcar Betty* that was two planes to the rear. Tracer rounds flew in every direction. “Sap, you got him!” Howard the top ball turret gunner yelled.

“I think the poor bastard flew into my rounds,” Sapienza replied. A Me-109 exploded just under their right wing.

Flak blew the nose off of *Boxcar* back to the cockpit. The B-17 stalled, and then nose dived. “Kranz was scheduled to go home,” Hornish said.

Paul didn’t answer. He ran a glove across the *Boeing* emblem in the middle of the half steering wheel.

“Bombs away,” Ellington said, releasing the bomb load precisely at the aiming point. The *Brooklyn Avenger* hopped fifty feet as the load left the plane.

“Let’s get out of here,” Paul said, pulling on the yoke with all his strength to turn out of the target. He could see the ragged formations behind the 20th being attacked. “The poor bastards are taking the heat.” He would never admit to anyone that he didn’t care. The *Brooklyn Avenger* had made it half way. If more of his compatriots had to take a pounding to get The *Brooklyn Avenger* back to Amendola, so be it.

Chapter 32

WASHINGTON, DC AUGUST 1944

“MR. MORGENTHAU IS HERE,” Florence Higgins announced over the intercom.

“I’ve got a mountain of papers on my desk,” Preston said, putting a folder into his satchel. “It was clean when I left two weeks ago.”

“Show him in,” John McCloy replied, suppressing his irritation knowing what was in store. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. had the president’s ear, and foremost he was Jewish. McCloy adjusted his shirt cuffs to show exactly one half-inch beyond his suit jacket sleeve. “I want you to stay.”

With a swoosh, the silver haired Mrs. Higgins opened the door for one of the original New Dealers. The fifty-three year old New Yorker had chaired the Federal Farm Board and Farm Credit Administration from 1933 to 1934 before being appointed Treasury Secretary in 1934.

McCloy rose behind his desk. “Henry, this is indeed a surprise,” he said with a broad smile. “Not many cabinet members make it across the river.”

Taking his cue, Preston followed standard operating procedure. He carried a tray consisting of a coffee carafe, two cups, and finger pastries to the Stanton table, then returned to his original position near the windows overlooking the Potomac.

McCloy met Morgenthau in the middle of the office. “Make yourself comfortable,” he said, sweeping a hand toward the “setup room.” “Henry, you know Captain Swedge.”

Preston had accompanied McCloy to several of the Refugee Board’s meetings where McCloy served as Secretary of War Stimson’s

representative. Stimson viewed the Refugee Board as a nuisance. McCloy was dubious of its need. "Nice to see you again, sir," Preston said.

"Likewise," Morgenthau said, taking a seat on the sofa. "Since our last meeting, the Hungarian situation has become more desperate."

Morgenthau was referring to the War Refugee Board, established by President Roosevelt on January 22, 1944 "to take all measures within its power to rescue the victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger of death." Its establishment followed a letter from Morgenthau to Roosevelt in which he condemned Assistant Secretary of State Breckenridge Long's "indifferent, callous and perhaps hostile" attitude to the Jewish issue. State had held up funds to rescue Romania Jews and ordered representatives to refuse reports of Nazi atrocities by persons other than authorized employees. The War Refugee Board gave hope to Jewish groups dealing with rescues and emigration.

"I would categorize it as difficult," McCloy countered, pouring two cups of coffee. "Horthy stopped the Hungarian deportations."

Admiral Horthy was the nominal head of the Hungarian government approved by Berlin. Morgenthau took a cup, dropping one sugar cube into it. "The Hungarian offer to send its Jewish population to any country that will open its borders is an empty offer. The United States, Britain, Australia or New Zealand can't or won't absorb them in sufficient numbers." Morgenthau paused, "The deportations are ongoing. In addition, trains from France, Holland, and Yugoslavia have made their way to Auschwitz."

The Germans had managed to mask their activities inside the killing complex at Oswiecim, Poland until June 1944 when a report from two Czechs escapees made its way to Switzerland. The eye witness report detailed the gassing and cremation of four thousand Czechs. McCloy had received a confidential assessment from Office of Strategic Services' Allen Dulles in Geneva that a million and a half Jews had already been murdered in Auschwitz, and that the Nazis were geared to complete the 'Final Solution' despite the Russian advance.

McCloy took a sip of black coffee. "Finding takers for the Hungarian Jewish population is a political issue, not a military issue."

"Seven-hundred thousand souls are awaiting their fate," Morgenthau solemnly said. His hands shook as he held the white china cup. "They're the last European Jews to be deported. Three-hundred thousand will be

murdered in the coming weeks. Their only hope is bombing the gas chambers and crematoria.”

This wasn't the first request that air power be used to stop the killing in Auschwitz and its associated camps. Months before, John Pehle, chairman of the War Refugee Board, had made a request to bomb the rail lines leading to the concentration camp. At that instance McCloy forwarded a memo from General John Hull of the Operations and Planning Division that nixed the idea with the following, “the most effective relief which can be given victims of enemy persecution is to insure the speedy defeat of the Axis.” McCloy attached his own memo which read, “The War Department is of the opinion that the suggested air operation isn't practical. It could be executed only by the diversion of considerable air support essential to the success of our force now engaged in decisive operations and would in any case be of such doubtful efficacy that it would not amount to a practical project.”

McCloy knew Hull hadn't conducted any feasibility studies and was amazed Pehle took both memos at face value. “Eisenhower could be across the Rhine in a couple of weeks. The Russians are advancing. The war in Europe is in its last days.” McCloy removed his cigar case from his jacket pocket, offered one to Morgenthau, then lit the stogie with a match struck against his shoe. “I wish we could smash the place to bits, but none of our planes fly that far east.”

Morgenthau put his cup on its saucer. “I thought we were supporting the Warsaw ghetto uprising.”

“Only with volunteer crews. Most of the planes ran out of fuel on the return leg and were lost. The operation has been abandoned,” McCloy said, exhaling a large plume of smoke. “Auschwitz is farther than Warsaw. B-17s don't have the range to make the return trip.”

Preston listened, pressing himself to the window ledge. He had delivered to McCloy reconnaissance photos taken on June 26 by the Fifteenth Air Force over Manowitz, Poland, a paltry four miles from the center of the concentration camp in preparation for a bombing campaign against the I.G. Farben synthetic rubber and oil plant. The main camp Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II also called Birkenau, and Auschwitz III the camp closest to the I. G. Farben plant were clearly seen. The irony wasn't lost on the son of the American financier who provided the capital for the plant's

construction. McCloy feigned indifference to the pending destruction, considering he had smoothed the way for Herbert Swedge in gaining the contract.

Morgenthau shook his head in despair. "I hoped that something could be done."

With a puff of his cigar, McCloy rose, signaling the close of the meeting. "Henry, trust me. Everything that can be done to stop the killing is being done."

Morgenthau gathered himself. "I understand." He turned to Preston saying, "You're fortunate to be assigned to Mr. McCloy." Morgenthau exited the office looking as if he aged ten years in a few minutes.

McCloy returned to his desk clenching the cigar between his teeth. Preston remained sitting on the windowsill. "Something on your mind?" McCloy asked.

Preston looked across the Potomac toward the Washington Monument. "You lied."

"There's a bigger picture that has to be considered," McCloy said. He leaned back in his chair.

Preston bowed his head. "Nothing can justify lying about our ability to bomb the camps."

"In January, a handful of American Zionists persuaded a number of congressmen to introduce a resolution. Palestine would be open for free entry to Jews in order that they may ultimately reconstitute Palestine as a free and democratic Jewish commonwealth. Jews trapped in Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary possessing visas would go to Palestine." McCloy flicked the cigar against a metal ashtray shaped from a Japanese bomb casing found on the sunken battleship Arizona. "The resolution blindsided me. I made a quick study of the issues involved and discovered back in 1922 a similar resolution was brought before Congress. The few Middle East experts in Army Intel confirmed the impressions I formed three months ago on a fact finding trip to Jerusalem. Unrestricted Jewish immigration into Palestine is sure to worsen the tensions in the region. The Jews and Arabs are already at each other's throats. Both sides are armed to the teeth, waiting for the opportunity to pounce.

"The second issue is oil. There are negotiations taking place with Saudi Arabia to lay a new oil pipeline from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean.

If the Saudis think there's a possibility of increased Jewish immigration, I believe they'll back out of the proposed deal."

Preston squared to McCloy. "There's enough oil in Texas to serve all our future needs. Who gives a damn about the Saudis?"

McCloy shifted in his chair and propped a foot on the edge of the desk. "Our lines of communication throughout Africa are to an important degree dependent on the cooperation and good will of the Arabs. The Abadan refinery at the head of the Gulf is the only Allied source of aviation gas outside of the western hemisphere. It would require a substantial number of troops to protect it in the event of disorder."

"So this is really about oil," Preston said in shock. "Hundreds of thousands are to go up the chimneys to ensure that black gold keeps flowing. If the inmates in Auschwitz are killed, they can't go to Palestine at the end of the war. This is making a deal with the devil, and some day whoever is involved is going to have to answer for it."

"You may be right, but I have to deal with the present. This war is all but won. We have to consider the Russians as our enemy. They're going to control half of Europe in the best scenario. Who knows where the final lines are going to be drawn." McCloy countered.

"How do the British factor into this, considering they run the Middle East?"

"Churchill is for a bombing campaign if that's the only option to stop the Nazi extermination plans. However, the Foreign Office, especially Anthony Eden, is dead set against such action. He feels the situation is explosive and doesn't want to set the fuse. I'll agree that it's heartless, but none-the-less, realistic." McCloy said. The direct line to Secretary Stimson rang. McCloy answered with two syllables, "O-kay."

McCloy moved the seascape oil painting on the wall behind his chair. The picture frame hinged to the wall opened like a bathroom medicine chest to reveal a safe. He removed a red colored binder, checked the contents, and held it out at arms length. Preston hesitated as though it was a lit stick of dynamite. "Preston, take the damn binder and read it over. I have to see Stimson."

Preston placed the "Ultra Sensitive-Eyes Only" binder on the adjacent leather chair. He didn't want to open it, sure that McCloy's remarks were the portent of something bad. It had been years since he felt anxiety like he

did in the backseat of his father's Packard on arriving at Princeton for his first semester. He was perspiring. Reading the thirty-five page report twice didn't change the facts.

McCloy returned, reached into the bottom drawer of the desk and removed a bottle of Jack Daniel's. He poured two shot glasses and pushed one across the desk. "From the look on your face, you didn't like what you read."

Preston swallowed the drink in one gulp.

"The Jewish action group that caused those scars on your face has placed people into the Fifteenth Air Force poised to take matters into their own hands." McCloy sipped the sour mash. "A mission is on the board for the twentieth of this month."

Preston fought to control his breathing. "You're giving me a week to get to Italy."

"You're spot on," McCloy said, draining his glass. "You're to evaluate the situation and take whatever measures necessary to prevent unauthorized attacks." He waited for a reaction. It was the time to find out if Preston had a backbone or was to be written off as a favor gone badly.

Preston looked him in the eyes. "What do you mean by *whatever* measures?"

McCloy answered by not saying a word.

Chapter 33

ITALY, AUGUST 1944

THE 2ND SQUADRON HAD BEEN SPARRING with the Devil for ten days straight resulting in six lost planes, butchered causalities, and a growing number of men lining up for sick call with stress attributed diarrhea and migraines. Colonel Wullien ordered the medical staff to “paint ‘em with iodine and mark ‘em for duty.” There weren’t enough reserves to take their positions and keep the squadrons flying. How far could a man be pushed? Wullien didn’t know. Word of a two day stand down came at an opportune time.

New movies from the States, a U.S.O. tour complete with a lineup of legs rivaling Betty Grable, and ice cream from an Italian plant made up and running by mechanics on the flight line pushed Ploesti and Blechhamer to a distant past.

“Come on Shep, all we need is a base hit,” Paul yelled from the sideline at the ball field constructed behind the bivouac. A round robin series was being played between squadrons. The winner would be crowned champ of the 2nd and go on to play for bragging rights of the entire Fifteenth Air Force.

With two outs, runners on first and second took their leads. The pitcher from the 96th squadron took a walk behind the pitcher’s mound. “In Brooklyn you may go for a base hit, but in the *man’s* game we play in Texas, we go for the fences,” Peterson yelled back, sweat seeping through his shirt.

Clenching a cigar between his teeth, Vinnie approached the 20th’s bench. “Lieutenant, a moment,” he said to Paul.

Paul shot Vinnie a quizzical look, holding up a hand to wait. “Mighty Casey’s about to swing.”

Peterson spit on his hands, re-gripped a cherry wood bat turned in the machine shop and dug his combat boots into the dried mud. The pitcher took the sign from his catcher, wound up, throwing a blooper ball to the plate. Peterson dribbled the pitch down the first base line, tripped over his feet, and fell flat on his face.

“Way to go!” Paul yelled, turning to Vinnie. “What can I do for you, sergeant?”

Vinnie plucked the cigar from his mouth. “The man wants to see you.”

Peterson bowed to the crowd that was serenading him with a chorus of boos. “When and where?” Paul asked.

“Foggia. 13:00. A shithole of a place called Carmine’s,” Vinnie said, bringing the cigar back to life. Smoke hovered over his head. “You’re as white as a ghost.”

Paul felt nauseous. “I can’t believe it’s going to happen.” He took a deep breath, trying to steady himself.

“It’s the reason we’re in the land of my ancestors.” The ex-New York enforcer spit a piece of tobacco, wishing Jake was there to smack his little brother. He handed Paul directions. “Memorize and get rid of them.”

Paul glanced at the scrap of paper and stuffed it into his fatigues. “Anything else?”

“The password is egg cream, the counter—nothing would be better,” Vinnie said, coolly. “*Capisce?*”

“I got it,” Paul said, averting his eyes away from Vinnie.

Vinnie snuck a peek at Peterson who was coming back to the bench. “The southern hick at twelve o’clock.” Paul needed an excuse to get away. He said loudly, “I don’t know lieutenant, all they said was you’re wanted at headquarters.”

With equipment in short supply, the teams shared gloves. Peterson waited for the opposing’s right fielder to trot in. “What about headquarters?”

“I have to go to Foggia to get a Red Cross message. I’ve been worried about my father since the last letter from my brother.” Paul said, taking Vinnie’s cue.

Peterson screwed up his face. “They normally bring Red Cross messages up here.”

“Shep!” called the right fielder, flipping the decrepit glove.

“Get back for the second game,” Peterson said, pounding the pocket of the Spalding special. He turned back toward the field. “Czerchowski, you’re playing short.”

Paul stood locked in place. “You’ve got less than an hour and fifteen to make your appointment,” Vinnie said. “I got a chauffeured ride lined up, let’s go.”



Paul jumped from the cargo hold of a six by six truck. “Piazza de Il Duce” was still visible where the letters had been chiseled off the red brick wall surrounding the square’s fountain. With Mussolini’s capture, an attempt was made to remove all references to the dictator. American personnel, despite the rules of occupation prohibiting selling personal allotments of cigarettes, slowly trolled the streets showcasing cartons under their arms. Military police looked the other way.

Paul crossed the plaza. Looking into the shops, he saw a common denominator—little or no goods. The city dweller was more disadvantaged than the farmer who had first crack at the meager crops he managed to raise. A resourceful underground economy found ways of procuring supplies from American bases. The black market was booming and the prices were astronomical.

Following Vinnie’s directions, Paul wandered through a rabbit warren of side streets. It was ten minutes to the meeting time. Nestled under a towering Mediterranean Cypress, an elderly street vendor worked a feather duster on a treasure trove of fresh vegetables. A boy, Paul judged to be around ten or twelve drew pictures along side the cart in the mud with a stone.

“Camel cigarette?” the boy asked, gesturing like he was smoking. The kid’s yellow shirt and brown pants were one step above rags.

Paul shook his head. It wasn’t uncommon to see seven and eight year olds chain smoking. Cigarettes were easier to obtain than food. The kid looked at Paul with a slanted smile, pointing to the old man. “For my

grandfather,” he said in halting English. A pack of Lucky Strikes stuck out of a hole in his back pocket.

Paul offered a pack of gum. “Cigarettes will stunt your growth.” It was the line his mother used when her sons wanted something in Schwartz’s candy case, something she didn’t have money for.

The kid shrugged his shoulders, snatched the gum, and stashed it in his other pocket. “Want girls?”

“Not today.” Paul held up a dollar bill, watching the miscreant’s eyes grow wide as the melons on his grandfather’s cart. “Take me to Carmine’s and it’s yours.”

The kid looked at the old man. Gesticulating hands matched the cadence of their rapid Italian. “Joe,” he said. Every American was Joe. “I will lead,” he said confidently, darting across the street, cutting between two horse drawn wagons.

Paul skirted the wagons. The kid was no where on the street. “Joe!” the kid called from midway down an alley. Paul’s hand itched toward the .45 automatic he carried when on a mission. The Boston cop Flannery warned ad-nausea of muggings and G.I.’s being rolled by hustling “Italian tomatoes.” This wasn’t a Brooklyn alley wide enough to back a garbage truck down. He needed to twist sideways.

The kid stood smoking a cigarette oblivious to rats as large as cats running from an open sewer. Navigating around a pile of debris from a building hit by a bomb, they turned a corner in the alley. “There Joe,” the kid said, pointing to *Carmine* scrawled into bullet tattooed alabaster stucco, souvenirs of a fire fight when Allied troops took the town in September, 1943. Two MPs armed with wood Billy clubs stood over a G.I. lying in the alley. Blood covered the grunt’s nose and saturated the front of his tunic.

Paul stared at the opened door. The kid stuck out a palm, wiggling his fingers. “Joe.”

“You did good.” Paul placed the bill in the kid’s hand.

“See ya, Joe. Come back tomorrow. I take you everywhere,” the kid said, lighting another cigarette before running off.

Paul returned the MPs’ salutes as he approached the threshold. With coal in scarce supply for the town’s generators, candles on the bar and tables provided minimal light. Paul looked for his contact. In three corners of the cramped cafe, G.I.s whispered into the ears of female “hospitality

specialists.” An air force captain with a football player’s build sat alone at the century old bar.

Paul cautiously approached. “I could go for an egg cream on a hot day like today,” he said, taking a stool.

“Nothing would be better.” The unnamed captain nodded. “*Angelo, vino per mie amico.*” He removed his hat, running a hand through a field of red hair.

Angelo appeared to be older than the century old walnut bar, poured a glass of Chianti, placing the fingerprint laden vessel before Paul. The captain lit a cigarette with one of the candles. “I’d suggest lunch, but unless you care for goat cheese, you’re out of luck.”

“I’m not hungry,” Paul murmured, trying to place the captain’s mid-west accent to Chicago where Jake made numerous trips, referring to his contact as the “red headed putz.”

The captain took a prolonged sip of his wine. “It’s been a tough ten days.”

“Only for crews pulling themselves through the belly hatch,” Paul shot back, failing to hide his dislike for desk jockeys.

In unison, the three couples left their tables. “*Areever derchee,*” one of the army guys said to Angelo.

“*Imbecille,*” Angelo said, waving a dish towel over his head. The American linguist stumbled to the door. “First the Black Shirts, then the Germans, now these. *Dio mio.*”

The captain laughed at Angelo’s remarks. “Let’s take a table,” he said, leading the way to a table in the far left corner. Wall sconces flickered and then glowed bright. “A miracle has occurred.”

Paul tested the wicker seat of a rickety chair and sat with a pronounced slump. He ran a hand across the table engraved with the names of towns spanning the map of the United States. “I’ve got a ballgame to get back to. What do you have for me?”

From an inside of his uniform jacket, the captain removed three 5x8 aerial reconnaissance photos, holding them like playing cards in a poker game. “In April, a photo recon mission captured this image when looking at oil production facilities in the Silesia area.” He placed one of the photos before Paul. “A freight train of cattle cars rolling onto a siding.”

Paul bent over for a closer look. "I can see people being herded off the trains," he said incredulously. "Where was this taken?"

"Auschwitz, the main killing center for, as the Nazis say, *untermenchen*, the sub humans," the captain said, lighting another cigarette. He placed a second photo on the table. "The round structure is the main gas chamber." He moved his index finger to another spot on the photo. "The smoke rising from the four chimneys are from burning bodies in the crematoria."

Paul finished his wine. "My and my wife's aunts, uncles and cousins have most likely come down this ramp at the siding and ended up the chimneys. How many have died in the place so far?"

"The estimates range from one to two million. Could be more," the captain took the last drag on his cigarette. "Three hundred thousand Hungarian Jews are waiting deportation. There aren't going to be any missions against the camp or the rail lines that lead into the facility."

"Somebody wants those people dead. It would be too easy to wipe out the trains and the camp," Paul said.

"The I.G. Farben synthetic oil and rubber plant in Manowitz, about four miles from Auschwitz, is now on the target list, penciled in for August twenty."

"That's in three days," Paul said, shaking his head.

The captain leaned toward Paul. "You're the only pilot in the network who's in position to do what should be official policy."

"I thought more pilots had been placed in this Theater." Paul felt his knees twitching.

"We had two others, but both were shot down within days of each other." The captain handed Paul the last photo. "Use the three intersecting power lines as the IP."

Taking off his cap, Paul placed his hands on his temples. "How am I going to pull this off?"

"I don't have any words of wisdom. You're going to get just one chance at the plate. It's the bottom of the ninth in this game of life and death. The only way we can win is for you to hit a home run."

"And if I hit that home run, what will the final box score read?" Paul asked.

"Hundreds of thousands saved. If you live to tell the tale, a court's martial will be waiting for you. Maybe you can make up a story why you

hit the wrong target. Blame your bombardier. To be honest, I don't think any excuse is going to cut it." The captain checked his watch. "I have to be going." He pat Paul on the shoulder and left.

Paul scratched at the dust on the floor.

Chapter 34

ITALY, AUGUST 1944

PRESTON RESTED HIS BACK against the rail. Thirty feet above field level, the observation deck on the Amendola control tower provided a panoramic view of the two parallel runways. Inside, controllers directed the homebound bombers of the 2nd Heavy Bombardment Group. The day's target was the small Privoser oil refinery at Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia, near the Polish border.

Preston attended the pre-dawn briefing at 04:30. This was a deep penetration raid past Klagenfurt, Steyr, Wiener Neustadt and Vienna, Austria and Győr, Hungary and Blechhammer, Germany where the 2nd had suffered serious losses in July. The light-hearted mood inside the Quonset hut turned tense when the map outlining the route was uncovered. The raid was intended to finish off the remaining Czech oil production. A diversionary raid to Szeged, Hungary with feints to Budapest and Vienna were designed to draw German fighters away from Ostrava.

Fire trucks and ambulances were parked with their engines idling along the flight line. Well rehearsed in rescuing injured from burning aircraft, maintenance crews lounged along the main runway smoking cigarettes, tossing baseballs or taking in the sun.

Colonel Wullien searched the horizon through a pair of binoculars. A briar pipe was stuck between his front teeth. The colonel reminded Preston of a nervous father watching for his kids coming home on the first day of school. Wullien turned from the rail. "Did you get the material you requested?"

"Thank you. The personnel files have been a real help," Preston said, shielding his eyes from the Mediterranean sun.

Wullien continued to sweep the sky. "Doesn't make any sense to me, but when the assistant secretary of war says to cooperate..." He had dealt with head hunters from the Pentagon before and learned the easiest way to defang the beast was to comply.

"Five minutes, colonel," one of the controllers yelled.

"Ever have a machine gun bullet wiz by your head, Captain Swedge?" Wullien asked, drawing on the pipe.

Specks on the horizon became larger as they closed the distance to the base. "The closest I've been to any action was a secretary throwing a pencil past my ear when I criticized her typing," Preston admitted.

Wullien turned back to the rail. "I'll arrange a ride before you skedaddle back to Washington."

Preston could see Wullien's lips move as he silently counted the returning planes. Counting the dots in the sky was a ritual that tested nerves. Not until the last plane was on the ground could he think of relaxing.

One of the planes fired a red flare indicating wounded on board. The *Dixie Queen* would have landing priority. Rescue crews ran to their vehicles. Wullien counted aloud, "Nine, ten, eleven..." Nine were missing. The flock that took off that morning totaled twenty. Wullien pushed up the bill of his hat. The color had washed from his face. "Nine lost," he grumbled. "Ninety men in the shitter. Let's go."

Wullien took the ten steps down two at a time with Preston on his heels to his Jeep sitting in the shadow of the control tower. The remaining ten planes landed in quick succession. Preston tried to read the names on the noses of the grey breasts as they rolled by, hoping that the *Brooklyn Avenger* was among the missing. Wullien slipped the Jeep into first gear. With the last bomber rumbling past, he accelerated across the runway to the bomber parking area, looping around emergency vehicles to slide to a stop beside the *Dixie Queen*. The bottom ball turret gunner was being carried from the plane on a stretcher. Blood covered his face and flight suit.

Wullien crouched over the wounded airman, whispering into his ear as medics worked to stem the hemorrhaging. Wullien helped lift the gurney into an ambulance then returned to the Jeep. "That kid got his arm blown off. Amazing he didn't bleed to death." He climbed behind the wheel. "Losses and casualties have been going down. I hate to think of them as

numbers, but the numbers are what the Pentagon is interested in. Ours have been great until today.”

Preston looked at the planes. Not one of the eleven was without damage. He couldn't comprehend what it was like flying at 22,000 feet in an open aircraft with enemy fighters heading dead on with multiple guns blazing away. There it was, three aircraft up the line—the Rothstein plane. “I don't know how you can do this day after day.”

“Neither do the brass back home,” Wullien said, relighting his pipe.

“I'll do my best to reflect your concerns,” Preston replied, keeping his eyes on the *Brooklyn Avenger*.

Crews, emerging with frostbitten blotches on skin not covered by their oxygen masks and goggles, stripped off flight jackets and suits. Several pilots huddled in animated conversation, pointing toward the *Brooklyn Avenger*. Preston strained to hear, catching one loud “Jew bastard.”

Cigarettes dangling from lips waited to be lit away from the gasoline fumes of near empty fuel tanks. Seven hours without a smoke came to an end as they climbed into the rear of six-by-sixes for the return trip to group headquarters.

Wullien led the procession, winding down the hills to the plateau below. The crews climbed from the trucks without words. One hundred-ten bodies filed into the assembly hall. Fifteen minutes was allotted for latrine use and grabbing a cup of coffee with a handful of doughnuts before debriefing commenced. Preston stayed near the entrance.

Wullien addressed the group. “I want to hear what happened, without dramatics.”

First Lieutenant William Hune of the 20th squadron which flew “tail-end-Charlie,” the last position in the last group in the bomber stream, began, “After the formation crossed the Adriatic, we were falling behind.”

“The squadron?” Wullien asked.

“No, the entire group, sir,” Hune replied. “Things got worse after we entered Czech airspace. Lagging from their squadrons, *Wolf Pack* from the 429th and a 17 from the 49th fell into our area.”

His co-pilot First Lieutenant Frank Finn chimed in, “A British B-24 was in trouble and losing fuel also fell in.”

Wullien turned to First Lieutenant Mike Melvin, a pilot in the forward 429th squadron. “From your vantage point, where was the 20th?”

Melvin looked at Hune. “They were lagging 1,000 to 2,000 feet below and 500 to 2,000 yards behind the group.”

Second Lieutenant Albert Dearing of the 49th squadron held up his hand. Wullien nodded for him to take the discussion. “I think Gerry figured out that our P-51s leave the formation naked to clean the air over the target. We had no protection.” His hands shook so badly he wasn’t able to light a cigarette.

Paul caught sight of the new face standing near the entrance, having the strange feeling they had met.

“Rothstein,” Wullien said, shaking his head. For months he’d been saying to Fifteenth command that the tactic of fighter escorts leaving the formation was inviting disaster.

Paul, without looking away from the entrance, cleared his throat. “We were below a thin layer of clouds when fifty to sixty Me-109s and at least twenty-four FW-190s began their attack. One force approached from the rear, while the others hid behind the clouds.”

Agitated, Hune interrupted, “Through the haze, we spotted the fighters to the rear, but they arrived when our escorts were to arrive. The bad guys were flying in a P-51 formation. The head on profiles of an ME-109 and a P-51 are almost identical. Before we realized what was happening, the combined enemy forces dove, overwhelming our defenses before we got a shot off.”

Wullien began pacing. “I want to hear about the nine planes lost. Let’s begin with *Wolf Pack*.

“I had a good angle,” Graham said. “Fighters made a single pass blasting away at *Wolf Pack*. A burst of fire from Rothstein’s aircraft helped finish her off.” He looked squarely at Paul.

“There’s no way,” Paul protested.

Otto Schrup, a lower ball turret gunner on Hune’s plane shouted, “Bullshit. *Your* waist gunner firing at one of the fighters took out the windscreen. A plane can’t fly without a pilot or co-pilot.”

Sapienza bowed his head. “It was fucking crazy up there.”

“*Wolf Pack* fell like a stone.” Graham took a seat, rocking on the chair’s rear legs and enjoying the skirmish. There was no love lost between him and Paul from their first meeting at bomber flight school. He said to Preston, “The responsibility is the pilot’s.”

“Rothstein didn’t fire the machine gun,” Preston countered.

“Doesn’t matter,” Graham replied with a grin.

The hall grew eerily silent. Melvin sprinted across the room, body slamming Vinnie onto his back. “You stupid piece of shit,” the pilot from Alabama, a veteran of thirty missions, said punching Sapienza in the mouth.

Paul joined the fray, pulling the former running back from Auburn University away. “You know how chaotic it was. We took fire from inside the box.”

Paul relaxed his grip on Melvin’s flight jacket, allowing Melvin to push away. Melvin shouted, “You’re a damn Jew who can’t control his crew, especially this here *I-talian*. This isn’t the first time your crew screwed up, just the first time it got somebody killed.”

Shep Peterson stepped between the combatants. “Nobody did anything on purpose, simmer down.”

“Enough!” Wullien shouted.

“What’s this all about?” Preston asked Graham who was standing next to him.

“Melvin and the pilot of the *Wolf Pack* were best buddies,” Graham explained. “A lot of guys don’t like Jews and fellows with names ending in a vowel. Peterson and Tom Hornish, Rothstein’s co-pilot are the only officers who cotton to him.”

“You’re not a pilot,” Graham said, lighting a cigarette. “What’s your game?”

“Evaluating morale and the effect of missions like today on the crews,” Preston said, watching three of Melvin’s crewmen help the heavily perspiring pilot to a chair.

“You a shrink?” Graham asked suspiciously.

“No. A roving bean counter.”

Graham grabbed a cup of coffee. “Meet me later, say about 19:00 at the Officer’s Club and we’ll talk more.” He moved off to a table on the other side of the room.

A hand shot in the air. “Peterson, something to add?” Wullien asked.

“A P-51 didn’t try to engage when *Wolf Pack* was under attack. I don’t know whether he had a mechanical problem, or a problem with his backbone.”

“Catch a tail number?” Wullien asked.

“457,” Peterson said. “The asshole, Johnson.”

A fighter pilot not coming to the aid of a bomber was unheard of. "I'll check into it," Wullien said. The lead debriefing officer pointed to his watch. Wullien was breaking protocol. Standard procedure was to get the crews to the debriefing officers while their recollections were fresh. "To the tables."

Chapter 35

ITALY, AUGUST 1944

PAUL SHIFTED BOOT TO BOOT in the olive grove three-hundred yards from the bivouac. Shadows cast by a half-moon didn't help his anxiety. There was movement to his left. Slinking behind one of the three-hundred year old trees, Paul eased the safety off on his .45 automatic. The night before, a pack of wild dogs mauled one of the enlisted men lubricated on the abundant local wine. The scuttlebutt carried the word of the kid being turned into a eunuch. One burst of a flashlight signaled the arrival of Vinnie Sapienza. Paul returned two flashes, moved the safety to the on position, and tucked the pistol into the waistband of his pants.

"Sorry, Paulie," Vinnie said. A wad of bills stuck out of his shirt pocket. "The schnooks woulda shit bricks if I left. I was on fire." A night didn't pass without the roll of the dice. "I made the rounds. Unfortunately, you're right."

"I knew Swedge's appearance wasn't by chance."

Vinnie cupped a match and lit a half-smoked cigar. "My man inside Wullien's office says Swedge showed up without warning."

Paul took Vinnie's cigar and took a pull. "Hornish stopped by my tent on his way from the club to tell me that Swedge has struck up a friendship with Chuck Graham."

"Like my mother used to say, assholes flock together," Vinnie said, taking the cigar back.

"I think she meant birds of a feather," Paul laughed.

"You didn't know my mother," Vinnie said, choking on the cigar's smoke. He pulled a new cigar from his pocket, throwing the old stub into the weeds.

“Do you have another?” Paul asked.

“Does your mother know you smoke?” Vinnie cracked as he split the Italian stogie in half, giving Paul the rolled end. “You nervous or something?”

“Like a cat on a hot stove.” Paul struck a match against a tree and puffed the DeNobli Toscani to life.

They sat on a rotting tree stump, the cigar smoke keeping the bugs at bay. “What did Buckley tell you?” Paul asked. Staff Sergeant Barney Buckley doubled as the town crier and Wullien’s aide. “Give it to me straight.”

Vinnie leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. “Swedge strolls into group headquarters, flashes a letter from the assistant secretary of war and Wullien wets himself. Swedge asked for the personal files of everyone in the group. Our colonel complied without as much as a why.”

“What in hell is he looking for?”

“I think it’s a smokescreen,” Vinnie said as he spit out a piece of frayed tobacco. “He asked if the records for the crew of the *Brooklyn Avenger* were complete and then quizzes him about each of us. For Buckley, every officer is an enemy. He gave Swedge a pile of shrugs and I don’t know.”

“Swedge is onto us, isn’t he?” Paul asked, looking at his glowing cigar.

“Swedge’s boss made a name for himself battling German spies and is responsible for locking up the Japs in California. The government has known about you and Jake’s amateur friends since day one.”

“Jake knew this all along.” Paul said dejectedly. “He was acting funny when he saw me off when I left for bomber training.”

“Why do you think I was at Ephrata to welcome you?” Vinnie pushed himself off the stump.

“My brother always treats me like a kid. He should have told me.”

Vinnie shrugged his shoulders. “It wouldn’t have changed a thing except you would’ve been watching over your shoulder instead of concentrating on learning how to fly.”

“And I was convinced that one of the crew wagged his tongue,” Paul said.

“I would have smelled something rotten with a nose like mine.” Vinnie touched his thrice broken centerpiece. “Swedge came to this garden of Eden already knowing that Jake got you placed. For all I know, he’s got me pegged too.”

Paul threw his cigar into the mud. “How come I haven’t been dragged off to the brig? He could have me busted in a minute.”

“Wullien wouldn’t let some asshole roll in here and take one of his pilots. Me, he couldn’t give a shit about, but one of his officers would be another story,” Vinnie said with a chuckle. “No, Swedge has to stop the plan by himself.”

“I can’t even come up with even a wacky idea how he could manage that,” Paul said.

Vinnie inhaled the cigar. “That my friend you leave to me. Remember, I was raised to think like a criminal. It’s the only reason I’m still alive.”

Chapter 36

ITALY, AUGUST 1944

PRESTON SAT AT THE DESERTED BAR in the officers club of the 325th Fighter Group at Lesina. A cold beer had barely removed the dust that invaded his throat during the two hour drive north from Amendola in an open Jeep. Preston didn't check in with the base commander. This visit was off the record.

Unlike Amendola, Lesina had traditional barracks and amenities for officers and enlisted men. The private tending bar tried to make small talk with the unnamed captain. "You from New York?"

"You wouldn't have been a cop before the war?" Preston joked. "Can't deny it. New York through and through. Where are you from, private?"

"Chicago," he said, wiping a glass.

Preston checked his watch. Assigned escort duty for the 2nd Bomb Group mission to bomb a synthetic gasoline production facility in Upper Silesia, Poland, the 325th had been on the ground for more than an hour and a half. The debriefing session was taking an inordinate amount of time. "A White Sox fan?"

The private spit into a garbage can. "I'm a Cub's fan. I wouldn't set foot in Comiskey." He finished stacking a supply of glasses. "Here they come."

The fighter jockeys filtered in. Preston didn't turn around. The pilots still high on adrenaline paid no attention to him as he watched in an ornate mirror hanging behind the bar. Hands diving and arcing through the air reenacted dogfights with enemy planes.

"Come on gopher brains, four bottles of beer. By now, you should have the routine memorized." The voice was the same and so was the tenor.

Cringing at the lambasting, Preston kept an eye on the private's right hand as it wrapped around the neck of a bottle, expecting to see it sail at his tormentor's head. It would have been sheer folly to believe that two years would have changed the loud mouth's behavior.

With the pilot's back to him, Preston said, "The Detroit Tigers couldn't beat a girl's softball team. They're nothing but a bunch of pansies."

For a moment, Clark Johnson froze then placed his bottle on a table. A broad smile crossed his face. "The City of New York is the receptacle for the unwanted." He turned around to face Preston, moved to the bar and wrapped his arms around his ex-roommate. "I can't believe it," Clark said. He grabbed his beer and moved to the seat next to Preston.

"I was in the neighborhood and couldn't pass on the opportunity to see an old friend. You haven't mellowed."

"It's amazing that we're winning the war with morons like him," Clark fumed, pointing a finger at the private who had moved to the other end of the bar. He eyed the silver bars on Preston's collar, snapping off a smart salute. "Moving up in this man's army."

"And this man's army has done wonders," Preston said, tapping Clark on his thinned down waist. "You've lost your Michigan baby fat. Is there anyplace we can go for some privacy? I have a few things to discuss, and I don't want an audience. Your buddies are wondering who I am. It would be the smart thing to introduce me."

"Guys," Clark said, turning around. "This is my roommate from college. Say hello to *Captain* Preston Swedge." Clark waited for the round of hellos to end. "I'm going to show him what an airplane looks like."

Clark put on his aviator sunglasses as they stepped into the still phosphorous white sun. "Let's walk toward the flight line." Fighter planes were staggered not more than the length of a football field away. "I have to admit that I haven't been too conscientious with my letters to Gloria. The base is one big locker room. There are a lot of temptations."

Ten fuel trucks rumbled past, sending up a mammoth cloud of dust. "Son of a bitch. This country is either dust or mud," Preston said, wiping grime off his face. "Remember my friend, this war isn't going much longer. If you survive, Gloria will never want to see your face. Millie decided that we're getting married in November."

Clark stopped and pumped Preston's hand. "Congratulations."

“Maybe yes and maybe no.” Preston said shaking his head. “There’s a small hitch. It seems I’ve become a father.”

Clark slapped his leg. “Who’s the mother?”

“A gal in California I met inspecting bases for McCloy. If Millie finds out...”

“Lieutenant,” one of the mechanics called out. “The gasoline line got nicked. You’re lucky the girl didn’t go boom.”

“I’m like a cat with nine lives,” Clark yelled back. They continued walking. “Don’t tell Millie, don’t have any contact with the woman, and don’t get involved with the kid.”

“She’s my daughter,” Preston said with a sigh.

“Those few minutes of pleasure will ruin your life.” Clark stopped. “Now that we’ve covered the society news, tell me why you’re here.”

Preston took a deep breath. “McCloy has got me involved in some nasty business.”

“I knew one day he’d collect on the IOUs we signed for arranging things.” Clark cleared his throat. “My father works the same way. He wouldn’t give you ice in the winter without conditions.”

Preston didn’t have time to debate McCloy’s motives. “I’ve learned that a Jewish defense group was behind the bombing at the Garden. The formation of what they call the Faction was a reaction to the rhetoric of America First, Lindbergh, Father Coughlin and the other anti-Semites. They saw what was happening to their European brethren and asked why it couldn’t happen to them.”

Clark fished a pack of Lucky Strikes from his jumpsuit. “It would never have happened...”

“It’s a moot point,” Preston interrupted. “They managed to place operatives in positions in the army chain of command where orders could be cut, moving three pilots into the Fifteenth. Two have subsequently been lost, the third is flying with the 2nd.”

“What’s that got to do with *me*?” Clark asked coolly.

“Have you heard about the killing centers the Nazis setup in the occupied territories?”

“Just bits and pieces,” Clark said, lighting the smoke. “Hard to believe the numbers.”

They reached the parked fighters where ground crews were going through their maintenance procedures. Several P-51s were missing engines. “The one with tail number AAF 457 yours?” Preston asked.

“Yeah, how did you know?” Clark asked, deeply inhaling the cigarette smoke.

Preston continued, “Their plan is for the remaining pilot to bomb the Auschwitz death camp.”

“I still don’t follow what you’re saying. A pilot can’t plan his own mission. So what’s the big fucking problem?”

“I’ve seen the target calendar. In two days, the I.G. Farben synthetics rubber plant four miles from the concentration camp will be hit. My guess is that’s when an attempt is going to be made.”

Clark lit another cigarette with the nub of the first *Lucky*. “It’s pretty ironic that your father worked so hard to raise the money for the development of synthetic oil, and now we are bombing the shit out of them. Pray tell, how do I fit into this?”

“You fly a P-51 fighter escort, correct? You escort B-17s of the 2nd almost every mission, and you get paid to shoot down airplanes.”

“Have you lost your mind?” Clark asked, wildly waving his arms. “How do you expect me to get away with something like that, if I was insane enough to agree?”

“I figure Paul Rothstein will lag behind the formation then make his move. When a Seventeen falls from the formation, a fighter escorts the plane. That’s when you take the marauder out. Oh, I left out one detail.”

“I can’t imagine what’s next,” Clark said, losing the sharpness in his voice.

Preston locked eyes with Clark. “I attended a debriefing session at the 2nd. One of the crews bitched that a P-51 with the tail number AAF-457 made no attempt to fend off a ME-109 as it attacked the squadron.”

Clark paled. “What’s his nose art?”

Chapter 37

ITALY, AUGUST 1944

THE 2ND HAD BEEN GROUNDED for three consecutive days of high winds and rain. Endless games of poker and dice took up time and diverted thoughts of the next mission.

“Paulie, I just got the word. Manowitz in two days,” Vinnie said excitedly. They were standing behind a supply shed in an attempt to keep out of the sight of the ever-peering Captain Swedge. In the past week, Paul was sure to find Swedge in the mess, briefing and debriefing sessions, and at *The Cave*. If his intention was to spook Paul, he was succeeding.

“Swedge had to show up and cause all this shit,” Paul said, adjusting his rain poncho. Heavy rain had turned to a drizzle and was forecast to end by the time of the evening mess. Despite the near 80-degree temperature, Paul felt a chill run up his back. “You’re sure about the target?”

Vinnie nodded. “As sure as one can be in this man’s army.”

“I have to talk to the guys,” Paul said, trying to stay calm. “If one of the crew has any doubt, I’m not going to go through with it.”

Vinnie grabbed Paul by his shirt. “You can’t squash the plan because of one yellow belly. Too many are going to die if we don’t go. You said so yourself, that’s why you got it sold. Maybe you’re the one who has doubts?”

“Fuck you!” Paul fumed.

Vinnie looked up at the lifting gray clouds. “My buddy in the motor pool tells me the Park Avenue cowboy came in two days ago early in the morning, signs out a Jeep. He brings the gut rattler back when it is almost dark. That by itself isn’t incriminating evidence, so I ask him where Swedge went. Mind you, my friend is no brain surgeon, and I get nothing. So I ask

him what did he see Swedge do before he left. He thinks for a while then says that he went and looked at the map on the wall, like he was studying for a test. I checked that map where my buddy thought he was pointing. I could only find one place that made any kind of sense. Lesina.”

“What’s he doing up at the 325th?” Paul asked.

Vinnie was more than his normally animated self, waving his arms like a Southern preacher. “Clark Johnson. Maybe Swedge goes up there just to see his *goombara cheech*, maybe he don’t.”

“I don’t like him visiting Johnson. We have to assume that Swedge has enlisted him, and for only one purpose.”

“Yeah, shoot our asses out of the sky if we make a move,” Vinnie stated without hesitation. “The best defense is a good offense. If we get the chance tomorrow, I say we take AAF-457 out. I already got a reputation for shooting down our own planes.”

“You can’t go and pop a guy on hunches, and that’s all we have,” Paul said. “Swedge might have a backup for Johnson if he should go down. How many are we going to kill?”

Vinnie shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

Chapter 38

ITALY, AUGUST 1944

WITH THE KEROSENE LAMP HARDLY putting out enough light to read, Paul struggled to complete notes to his family and make what might be a final entry into his diary at a writing desk fashioned from milk crates and a wing flap from a junked B-17. He didn't want to waste a moment of privacy. Shep Peterson was snoring on the other side of the tent. The two other cots were without occupants since the devastating mission to Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia. Peterson wanted to send the empty cots to the scrapheap, claiming they were jinxed. No pilot managed to call them home for more than three months.

His letters home were a mixture of emotions. To Jake, he wanted to assuage any guilt that his brother might feel. The decision to complete this mission was his alone having entered into the plan with open eyes.

Paul explained to Sarah, that by her receiving his letter, he was either dead or a prisoner of war. He needed to make amends for the deception perpetrated for the past five years. There were occasions when he thought Sarah was being coy, seeing things but not letting on. While the events of the world had placed their lives on hold, they were the reason for their relationship. Cousin Minnah had brought the evil of Germany and its terror to Brooklyn.

"Briefing at 04:30!" Sergeant Barney Buckley sang his regular tune. Shep Peterson didn't move. "Lieutenant Rothstein, can you do me a favor and roust Lieutenant Peterson. When he's snoring like a grizzly I hate to mess with him."

Paul turned up the kerosene lamp to its maximum, casting the tent in a strange yellow light. He picked up a pair of socks from the clapboard floor,

firing them at the unconscious Texan. Buckley tipped his cap and moved on.

Peterson opened his eyes, momentarily not knowing where he was. He checked his watch and pushed the mosquito netting away from his cot. “What the hell are you doing?” Peterson asked. “Getting a head start with Santa Claus?”

“I’m catching up on letters, and I’m wondering if you could do me a favor?”

Peterson sat on the edge of his cot. “What do you want me to do?”

“In case I don’t come back, I want you to mail these letters. One other thing, I want you to keep my diaries. When you get home, send them to my brother.”

Peterson shook his head. “What’s this shit about you not coming back?” He eased into his boots. “You talk like that and bad things happen.”

Paul addressed a large envelope to Jake’s office address at the pier. “The letters should make it through the censors, but my diaries won’t pass. Make sure nobody gets their hands on them.”

Chapter 39

ITALY, AUGUST 1944

PRESTON SHIFTED TEN ROWS FORWARD from his usual spot to the left of the entrance and an unobstructed view to the crew of the *Brooklyn Avenger* as Dexter completed roll call. All were present. With targets being defended by the Germans at all costs, losses continued to stress the replacement and substitution lists. Every available officer was in the Quonset and would soon be in the air. Bradford unveiled the target—Manowitz, Poland, another deep penetration raid of 760 miles. “We’re hunting for oil again,” Bradford opened, drawing the usual chorus of groans. Every target but one to support the invasion of southern France in the last four weeks had been against oil installations and a minimum of seven hours in the air. “The GAF in this region of Poland is for all intents and purposes non-existent. Scattered flak batteries and smoke generators are the prime defenses.”

Manowitz was a wish come true. It would count toward the fifty missions required to rotate home and wouldn’t draw a bead of sweat. The 2nd had seen their share of smoke and flak. Scattered flak was equal to a bunch of pea shooters. It was the swarming Me-109s that caused havoc. Manowitz was going to be a “milk-run.” The lights at the rear of the stage were lowered. The first reconnaissance photo was projected. Bradford continued, “This is the IP four miles from the I.G. Farben complex.” Four chimneys surrounded by acres of military style barracks filled the screen.

Preston had seen this photo of the Birkenau section of the Auschwitz concentration camp in McCloy’s office a month earlier. Bradford made no mention of the concentration camp. Preston wasn’t surprised—only a select number of the intelligence community were privy to the details.

The next slide was put up. Bradford moved close to the screen. "This is the heart of the target. The chimney on the boiler house is four-hundred feet tall." He traced the wood pointer across the screen. "A power line runs north from a transformer station to a gas generation plant. It's the least protected in the concrete installation. You hit it, production is *kaput*, and you don't have to go back."

Preston stared down the row. Paul Rothstein wasn't enjoying the moment with his fellow pilots. Paul turned. A broad smile filled the pilot's face as he flashed the thumbs up. Preston nodded his head in recognition. A surreal bond was forged, like two heavyweight boxers standing in their corners for the start of the fifteenth round.

Colonel Wullien concluded the briefing by warning, "It's real easy to lose your edge when you don't think you're going to get your ass shot off. Stay alert and come back safely."

The assembly snapped to attention. Wullien and Dexter descended the stage. The crews gathered their belongings and began filtering to the ready room. Paul sidestepped Hornish walking directly toward Preston. "Captain Swedge, you have the uncanny resemblance to someone I knew back in New York who hung around Madison Square Garden. I asked him why he spent so much of his time there. You know what he said? Because it was such a blast."

Preston didn't flinch. "I must resemble more than just one handsome fellow in the city."

Paul closed the distance till they were nose to nose. "The guy had a friend who I'd bet would make a helluva fighter jockey." Paul adjusted his cap, took two steps back, and saluted.

Preston's rubbed his clammy hands together resisting the old demons that overcame him in the back seat of his father's Packard that summer day in 1938 on the drive to Princeton. He rested against the wall, thinking about how he became involved in such craziness. Bradford having caught bits and pieces of the conversation slipped un-noticed to his side. "Anything wrong?"

"Lieutenant Rothstein was mistaken in thinking we had met in New York," Preston said, recovering his composure.

Bradford had argued the finer points of Yale-Princeton football with Preston the day before in *The Cave*. "How about joining me for a cup of

coffee?”

“I appreciate the offer, but I have a few things to wrap up before leaving for Washington,” Preston replied, not wanting to extend the conversation. Bedford shrugged his shoulders. “Maybe we’ll meet at one of the games.”

Preston figured the odds were slim and none. “I look forward to it.”

In groups of six and eight, crews boarded the trucks waiting to ferry them to their ships. Paul and Shep Peterson exchanged handshakes with the big Texan bending down to speak into the smaller New Yorker’s ear. Preston marveled at the unlikely pair’s friendship.

Returning to the bivouac, Preston walked the rows of tents, making certain the area was deserted. It wasn’t uncommon for pilots who weren’t flying for medical reasons to be in their tents. He made his way to *The Alamo*. Gigham mentioned that Rothstein kept a diary and he was determined to find it.

The footlocker stenciled “Rothstein” on the side yielded two uniforms and five books, the bed nothing. Preston moved to Peterson’s cot. Under the pillow were two letters addressed to Paul’s family. Knowing that Rothstein couldn’t take the diary onto the plane, it had to be in the tent, doubting Paul trusted anyone other than Peterson to keep it.

With limited places available to conceal an object, he focused on the wood slat floor. Lines scribed into the ever-present film of dirt led to the legs of Peterson’s cot. Using his pocketknife, he pried up a one-foot square section, revealing a .30 caliber ammunition box.

Preston extracted the metal box. Releasing the latches on the lid, Preston found what he was after—a manila envelope. He replaced the box into the floor, and returned the cot to its original position. Tearing the envelope open, Preston removed four composition size notebooks, making sure they were Rothstein’s. Putting the letters and the diaries into the envelope, he tucked the package under his tunic.

Secluding himself into the office provided by Wullien, Preston read Paul’s diaries, questioning if he would have possessed the character

necessary to complete the mission conceived and planned by his older brother if the roles were reversed. "Captain," Buckley yelled through the thin pine door, "the birds are returning to the nest."

Preston packed his satchel and picked up his travel bag. Buckley didn't look away from his typewriter. "I'm signing out one of the Jeeps," Preston said. "I'll make sure it's returned from Foggia."

Buckley didn't miss a beat at the Remington. "Wave that piece of paper from Mr. McCloy when you get there..."

Preston didn't wait for Buckley to finish turning the knife. The drive up the mountain seemed to be longer and the stairs to the tower seemed a little steeper. Acknowledging the controllers, he made his way to the observation deck. Preston felt the weight on his chest growing heavier and had to make an effort to engage Wullien in a conversation. "The crews were saying this was going to be a milk run. Is there really such a thing?"

Wullien lit his pipe. "This one should be a piece of cake, but the Seventeen sometimes does funny things. A free-wheeling prop, lost oil pressure or an exploding engine can take out a crew."

The familiar shout of incoming planes was heard. The ground crews began their choreographed welcoming dance. Despite the presumption of an easy mission, the medical personnel were ready for the worst.

Lips moved in unison, counting aircraft. The sky remained flare free, there were no wounded. It was indeed a milk run. The count was started. There was an aircraft unaccounted for. "Now you see, Swedge, why I'm going gray," Wullien grumbled. "I didn't have a one until I took this command. Sergeant, find out who it is."

The sergeant returned holding his clipboard. "It's the *Brooklyn Avenger*, Rothstein's plane."

Weston tapped his pipe against the railing. "You want a ride back for debriefing?"

Preston made a point of checking his watch. "I have to get back to Foggia." For a second, he could see Wullien question why he had bothered to go to the control tower if he wasn't going to the debriefing session.

"When you get back to Washington, tell them what life is really like over here."

"Colonel, my report will reflect your concerns," Preston said. He needed to get a message to "Uncle John."

Chapter 40

PRINCETON, NJ DECEMBER 2000

“SON OF A BITCH!” MANNY SAID, slamming the last installment of Preston’s diaries on his desk. For nearly two hours, the corpulent publisher sat at the scarred desk that had been in the office before Lincoln was elected. “I can’t fucking believe it.” He removed his foam neck support from the bottom desk drawer and adjusted it under his chin.

“Three hundred thousand Hungarian Jews died after Rothstein was shot down,” Joe said. “I’m positive that Gloria Johnson knows all about her husband having his hand in it.”

Manny finished the last of the doughnut holes that Joe bought on his way into town. “You have to call Driscoll. If Jake Rothstein is alive, he might be of value in finding him. Bob asks about you whenever we speak.”

Robert Driscoll was the FBI agent in charge of the case when Joe and Manny suffered their injuries. Joe held Driscoll responsible and hadn’t spoken to the special agent after being released from the hospital. “I’ve done it. The putz is supposed to get back to me.”

Manny re-adjusted his neck brace. “After Clark’s murder, I was amazed how the young widow handled things so well. In retrospect, Ellis Price did her a favor. Let’s go over to Gloria’s and relieve her of the burden of having to conceal Clark’s dirty little secret.”

Manny insisted that they take his car. “I have to make a quick stop,” he said, pulling into Princeton Gardens. He ran into the store, returning with an assortment of orchids. “Gloria’s favorite. They’ll throw the old girl off.”

Steel gray skies and a dropping thermometer produced a mixture of snow and sleet. “Looks like the weathermen might be right for once,” Joe said, cracking the window of the ten year old Saab. He lit a cigarette. “The old

lady is going to have a shit fit when she sees me. She'll use the flowers as a weapon."

"I'll run interference," Manny said, making a left from Nassau onto Cedar Lane. Sounds of whirring chainsaws and splintering wood drowned out the jalopy's rattles. A hollow stump was the remains of a Dutch Elm in the center of the lawn. The main trunk was sectioned and stacked in the rear of a dump truck from Skillman Nurseries. Two laborers were feeding small limbs into a wood chipper.

Manny parked across the street. "I'll draw the prey to the door. Skirt along side of the driveway and be ready to pounce. Give me thirty seconds head start." Darting across the no-man's land of heavy equipment and tree debris, he cut directly to the fieldstone landing. Hiding the bouquet behind his parka, he gave the brass knocker two sharp raps.

Gloria Johnson appeared with the scraping of the deadbolt cylinder. "Manny! I thought it was the tree-man." A broad smile eradicated the innumerable lines on her face.

With a sweeping motion, Manny presented the flowers.

Gloria's blue eyes beamed with delight. "They're beautiful!" she said. Out of the corner of her eye, the Princeton matron saw Joe leaning on the five-iron at the side of the walk. Her smile turned to ice. "I didn't realize you knew each other."

"We need to talk," Manny said.

Gloria took the flowers, stepping back into the foyer. "You both know the way to the kitchen. I'll find a vase."

Joe closed the door. In the two months since his first visit, Gloria had repapered the hall. Gone were the falling leaves, replaced by a pale green grass weave. He stopped to view the family picture gallery, zeroing on Clark's "look at me, I'm the cat's pajamas" picture. "Now that was one heck of a guy," he whispered to Manny, smudging the ruddy face with a spit-laden thumb.

Manny and Joe sat at the kitchen table while Gloria busied herself cutting the stems and arranging the orchids with the accompanying greens. She placed the cut crystal vase on the center island next to her handbag and keys. Not looking at her guests she said, "I baked these this morning." Her trembling hands clawed at the clear wrap covering a plate of cookies. "I had a feeling I was getting company."

Without hesitation, Manny took a chocolate chip. “We were in the neighborhood and decided to say hello.”

Gloria scowled at Joe. “Don’t patronize me. This isn’t social, it’s about Preston and my husband.”

“The jig is up. Preston’s diaries landed in my lap,” Joe said. “Did Clark talk about a mission that he flew on August 20, 1944?”

“If he did, he did it with Preston,” she said with considerable unease.

“Come on Gloria,” Manny snapped. “Clark and his good buddy were bonded not only by their Princeton days but also by the blood on their hands. No matter how he tried, Clark couldn’t wash it away. Maybe that’s why he fell into the bottle.”

Gloria became unglued. “Why must you stir things up?” she asked, searching through her bag. “I don’t see any good in rehashing the past.” A pack of Merits tumbled to the counter. Gloria clamped a cigarette between her lips.

Joe, watching her fumble with her lighter, fished his Zippo from his jacket and pushed away from the table. He flicked the Vietnam relic, producing a welder’s flame. Gloria swept her pageboy out of harm’s way and lit the cigarette. “Take a seat,” Joe said, guiding an unsteady Gloria by the elbow.

“No one wanted those people,” she said defiantly. “Do you want examples?”

“Like the ship the *St. Louis*?” Joe asked.

“Yes,” Gloria said, looking into the distance. “Roosevelt did nothing to allow it to dock in Florida where it was floating off the coast for days.” She took a deep pull on the low tar cigarette. “Roosevelt’s sister wasn’t even for bringing Jewish children here, because she said they were like kittens—they grew up.”

Manny chomped on a cookie. “So it’s all right that three-hundred thousand innocent people including my grandfather’s brother were gassed and cremated after August 20, 1944 when one bomb could have destroyed the means to kill them?”

“Who am I to say what was right? Many decisions were made during the war that now seem callous,” Gloria said. “This was Preston’s doing. He brought the orders from John McCloy. Clark was in a no win situation”

“They were just following orders,” Manny said with disgust. “The same defense used at the Nuremberg war trials.”

Veins in Joe’s neck stood, stretching against his skin. “Clark bragged he and Preston saved the world,” Joe charged. “From what?”

Gloria fiddled with the string of pearls around her neck. “From having to deal with the European Jews after the war,” she murmured.

“Despite McCloy’s machinations, Israel became a state,” Manny seethed. “Clark’s participation in the scheme to prevent immigration to the area was for nothing.”

Stretching for the ashtray in the center of the table, Gloria smashed out her cigarette. Joe leaned against the center island. In a way he felt sorry for Gloria. Her long deceased husband had been a down to the bone bastard. She knew it. Having it thrown into her face after forty years couldn’t be pleasant. “Did Clark ever express any remorse for killing Rothstein, the other nine men on his plane, and to what happened to the innocent on the ground?”

“Clark weighed the consequences of what he did, whether it was on the job, or if he was buying a garden hose,” Gloria said with a faint smile. “I never heard him say he was sorry about anything.” She struggled to her feet. “I’ll be right back.” With measured steps, she crossed the kitchen to the hall leading to Clark’s room.

“We better lighten it up,” Joe said. “I don’t want to be responsible for giving her a heart attack.”

Manny snatched another cookie. “Gloria is a tough old bird who can take it as well as she can dish it. She wouldn’t have admitted anything if we didn’t bash her over the head.”

Gloria returned with a paper shopping bag. “I’ve been saving these since 1960,” she said, dumping the contents on the table.

Joe picked an invitation size envelope off the chocolate chip cookies. Gloria’s name and address were in a clean rigid script of a man’s hand. There was no return address. The stamp was cancelled on August 19, 1972 at the main post office in Manhattan. He opened the envelope and read aloud, “Happy anniversary.”

Manny opened another envelope. “The same.”

“I received one this year. They’re identical and always are delivered on the 20th of August.” Gloria said, lighting her second cigarette. “I was afraid

to call the police, but it doesn't matter any longer. Lieutenant, can you make them stop?"

Gloria's vinegar was gone. She was aging before their eyes. "I'll make it a priority," Joe said.

Chapter 41

WESTFIELD, NJ JANUARY 2001

ARTIE SHAW'S BEGIN THE BEGUINE blasted from Joe's cell phone. Without opening an eye, Joe searched the night table. "Bob Driscoll here, go ahead and say it for old time's sake."

"Fuck you," Joe complied, sitting up.

"Now I feel whole," Driscoll said with an imperceptible laugh. Joe's carping was wearing thin. "I've finished digging around."

Joe picked a cigarette from a pack on the night table and chewed on the filter, fighting to light up. He was smoking two packs a day. "You were..."

Driscoll cut him off. "Meet me at the diner on North Avenue in fifteen minutes."

"You were supposed to get back to me weeks ago," Joe said. He waited for a torrent of expletives. The special agent could invent anatomical positions unknown to the *Kama Sutra*. There was nothing but silence. Joe looked at the face of the phone. He was talking to himself. Driscoll had ended the call. "Shithead."

"Jozef," Alenia cooed. "Lie down and cud-dle. This is the last day before Harry comes home and..." She buried her head in her pillow.

Harry was on his way back from someplace Joe heard mentioned in a geography bee Emily participated in the seventh grade. Harry's plan was to spend a day in Westfield before whisking his bride to Palm Springs for three or four months. Joe had no doubt that Alenia would find a new diversion, someone discreet to pass the time. "Sugar, I have some business to do." He pinched her under the covers. "Keep things warm, I'll be back in the time it takes for a bikini wax."

"I won't miss this Swedge craziness," she sobbed.

Joe threw on a sweatshirt and a pair of flannel lined jeans that had hung in his closet for four mild winters. This winter was breaking the streak. An accumulation of eighteen inches of snow from four storms over ten days was on the ground. He stepped into his waterproof Wellingtons, slipped on his all-weather coat and grabbed the five-iron next to the door.

Dodging snowplows and salt spreaders, Joe worked his way to Populopulos's North Avenue Diner at the intersection of North and Elmer. The twenty-four hour eatery's loyal crowd wouldn't miss the \$.99 breakfast special if a nuclear attack decimated the eastern seaboard. Joe squeezed the Volvo between a black Mercedes and a rat colored Land Rover in the ice spotted lot.

"Lieutenant Joe," owner Eusebio Populopulos said, holding a stack of menus. Flecks of filo surfed on his thick black mustache. He scoured the packed dining room for a vacant table. Clanking dishes and fifty plus conversations melded into an ear aching din. "There's a seat at the counter."

"Not today Sebi," Joe said, looking down the rows of booths for Driscoll. "I'm meeting an old friend. Six-two, crew cut, and a nose that took a few too many right hands. He should've arrived a few minutes ago."

Populopulos held his finger to his lips. "Let me think. Ah...He's been here more than half an hour. Back room."

Joe unzipped his coat and skirted around the line waiting at the cashier. With a nod to the blonde manning the counter, he aimed for the rear of the rectangular dining room and an archway bedecked with a coterie of Greek gods. For the past year, Joe rehashed the events leading to being shot at the Westchester, NY FBI safe house supervised by Driscoll. He had prepared a speech and honed it to a rapier edge to cut down the special agent's flippant attitude and gargantuan ego.

With a foot inside the non-smoking area, Joe zeroed in on the tips of a gray flecked crew cut peeking over a copy of *The New York Post*. Driscoll sitting with his back to the corner had a natural field of fire. Flipping the tabloid's pages, the twenty-five year FBI veteran saw Joe slip through the line at the register. Driscoll looked at the five-iron and said, "Playing through? Personally, I use an orange ball in this weather."

"I'm doing just fine, A-one, fit as a fiddle. Thanks for asking," Joe said, taking a seat.

Driscoll lowered the paper and ran a hand across the stubble on his chin. He appeared to have cracked an all-nighter. A master of wringing information from detainees, his sweat-streaked white shirt told the tale of a nasty interrogation. "I've been following your ongoing saga via Manny."

"I appreciate your concern," Joe said, looking at Driscoll's dirty dishes. Toast crumbs, remains of the breakfast special spoke volumes. The meeting wasn't going to be a pat on the back, glad to see you, kiss and make up occasion. "Manny had to tell you that I'm seeing a shrink."

Driscoll folded the paper and took a sip of his coffee. "He's mentioned something."

"I've changed." Joe signaled a waitress for a cup of coffee. "My first impulse was to bend the shaft of this club around your neck. I've learned to control my anger. Now, I'd like to ram it up your..."

"Here you go, Joe," the saucy waitress said, placing a steaming mug before him. She gave him a wink. "Anything else I can get for you?"

"Not now darling," Joe replied with a tap to her bottom. He tore the seal on a creamer, pouring it into the steaming brew.

Driscoll shook his head at Joe's attempt to bait him. "I said I was sorry a million times. What happened at the compound was my responsibility despite the circumstances. If it's not good enough, you can go to hell."

Joe stirred his coffee, dropping the spoon on the table. "Listen..."

"Grow up!" Driscoll snapped, leaning across the table. "Shit happens and it happened to you. Wipe it off and get on with your life. I went through a period in my life when Jim Beam and Johnny Walker were my best friends. Keep going like you are and you'll be one of the bums outside Bellevue begging for quarters."

Joe took Driscoll's counterpunch without flinching. "I'll write it down as soon as I get home."

Driscoll popped the latches on his black attaché case and placed two 8 x 10 photos on the table. "From Jacob Rothstein's booking in 1947 and his release from Sing Sing 1960."

"He didn't change in thirteen years, but for the gray in the coal-black hair," Joe said, examining Jake's front and profile shots. He read from the weight notation, "Two-fifty when he went in and two-fifty when he stepped into the sunshine. His reputation was a tough guy strong man. He looks the part."

“I found six New York City addresses in his parole records. I don’t know where he’s living now, not having to report for a long time. His social security checks get directly deposited. The address on the account is a box in a Mail Boxes Etc. The same for his tax returns.

“This stuff wasn’t lying around. It’s cost me a few favors, and I hate owing.” Driscoll put on a pair of readers sold in a dollar store and shuffled through the file. “After the war, Jake became involved with Meyer Lansky the Jewish Mafia wiz who set up the initial operations in Las Vegas and Havana. Lansky took a sabbatical to procure army surplus for the Holocaust survivors in Palestine in their battle to form a Jewish state. Rothstein was his right hand, using his network setup before and during the war. Lansky scoured the salvage yards, buying munitions and airplanes wherever he could find them, while Rothstein’s minions drove through Jewish neighborhoods in the cities collecting everything from old army boots and uniforms to souvenir German bolt action rifles. The Bureau was only concerned that he was going to use the weapons in the country and kept its hands off.”

The waitress refreshed Driscoll’s coffee and placed the check on the table. Driscoll waited for the girl to walk away. “According to memos I’ve run across, there were serious disagreements between the Bureau and State,” Driscoll said, taking a slurp from his mug. “State was determined to prevent the shipments, and insisted that Hoover arrest Rothstein and his crews. Hoover hated the Arabs more than the Jews and ordered Rothstein be let alone.”

Joe raised his eyebrows. “The Mafia having the goods on Hoover’s cross-dressing and his close relationship with his deputy Clyde Tolson have something to do with the hands off order?”

“Who knows?” Driscoll wet his index finger with his lips and flipped through the papers. “One more thing you will find interesting. If State couldn’t stop Jake Rothstein’s collections in the United States, then they still could try to interdict the goods overseas. Mercenaries were hired to hijack and destroy the cargo ships. Take a guess who was in charge. I’ll save you the trouble, Preston Swedge.”

“According to those acquainted with Preston, he was involved with oil issues while at the State Department,” Joe said. “What you’re telling me, doesn’t jive.”

“The simple answer is, he was CIA with a diplomatic cover,” Driscoll said, tossing the tip for the waitress on the table. “I’ve got to be going. The stuff between Swedge and the Rothsteins happened a long time ago.” He put the documents back into his attaché case. “This country has new problems, like the radical Muslims who want to destroy New York City. You keep the pics.”

Humbled, Joe said, “Thanks for your help.”

“A bullet wound is worth only so much. We’re all square.” Driscoll put on his coat. “Next time you need something, don’t call.”

Chapter 42

WESTFIELD, NJ JANUARY 2001

LIFE CAME DOWN TO WALKING THE AISLES of the reinvented Stop and Get It grocery in the middle of town. Gone were canned fried onions stacked to the ceiling for Thanksgiving green bean casseroles. Wide aisles with overhead mood lighting, shelves stocked with organic products, display cases of imported cheeses with names labeled in languages only translators at the U.N. would recognize, and employees in uniforms worthy of *haute couture* combined to make Stop and Get It a Yuppie destination.

After twenty-one straight days of staking out Duke's Deli from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. parked in the train station lot on South Avenue, Joe gave up. Playing hunches and trusting his gut instincts never before failed to pay off. He hit the lottery on his lucky numbers and risked his reputation by putting the fugitive homicidal maniac John List on America's Most Wanted. He would have bet the ranch that it wasn't by chance that Jake grabbed a tuna sandwich at Duke's the day Preston died—everyone has a favorite sub-shop, including octogenarian ex-cons. Joe didn't believe Jake was living in Manhattan. The mail drop in Mail Boxes Etc. was a ruse. Jake was living in the area and one day he'd find him.

Dr. Headcase said his depression was understandable given the circumstances. No Jake equaled no closure, and despite his denials, he missed Alenia. He should go to Arizona to see his daughter Emily and lay it on the line with Elaine. He controlled his future. If their marriage was over, he needed to face it. Did he want to move on or live in suspended animation?

Joe circled aisle two. Six packs of imported and domestic beer beckoned, bringing his salivary glands to peak production. He jerked his hand away

from a Beck's cardboard handle. "My name is Joe and I'm an alcoholic" jabbed him in his conscience. It had been four days since the start of AA meetings and his last drink.

Wandering through produce, he cut down aisle five. "My name is Joe and I need some pickles and tuna fish," he chuckled to himself, grabbing four cans of albacore packed in water off the shelf.

"Chunk light, solid white, in water or oil," came from his left. "I never can make a decision, so I go to Duke's for a sub."

Placing the cans in the cart's jump seat, Joe turned to face a silver haired gentleman with the height of a professional basketball player. No coat was in sight on the coldest day of the winter. He wore a heavy beige gabled fisherman's turtleneck sweater and a pair of well worn '60s style desert boots. From the mug shots provided by Driscoll, every crease, pockmark and freckle on Jake Rothstein's face was burned into his memory. "Solid albacore in water is the only way to go," Joe said. In the forty years since his parole photo was taken, Jake Rothstein hadn't changed but for the silver mane. "Mr. Rothstein."

"Jake will do," he said. "You've been looking for me. Freezing your ass off in that Volvo rattletrap had to be fun."

"Ringing my bell instead of playing cat and mouse would've saved me a boatload of trouble," Joe said, gripping the five-iron.

"How about a cup of coffee? I'm buying," Jake said, moving out of the way of a woman with three kids hanging onto her shopping cart. "I'd say we go for a drink, but I know you're on the wagon."

Joe wondered what other personal info Jake had, chasing the thought that he had been tailed by the suspect he was searching for. Jake had the advantage and Joe knew it. "Let's go."

They walked to the coffee bar in the rear of the store. Jake ordered two regular coffees and found a bistro table away from a keyboard player pounding out a Billy Joel song to the delight of the mostly female latte drinkers.

"Why did you leave the sandwich?" Joe asked, carefully taking a sip through the plastic lid.

Jake maneuvered his legs under the short table. "I got rattled." He wiped his nose with a napkin. "Swedge was grabbing his chest, gasping for air, and pressing the button on the pendant around his neck as the mailman was

shoving his delivery through the slot. I knew when I got out the back door, leaving the sub would become a problem.”

“Why run?”

“I’m an ex-con, it’s a tough habit to break.” Jake removed the lid and slurped an inch off the near black coffee. “They never put in enough milk.”

“It was a game with Preston, wasn’t it?” Joe asked.

Jake laughed. “At first, I traveled in from the city to bust his chops. It was tricky when his wife was alive. After she passed, I took an efficiency apartment in scenic Garwood to screw with his mind. I’d get right behind him in the bank, in the grocery store, and even at the town council meetings he loved so much.”

Garwood, a blue collar town with multiple unit housing, bordered Westfield. It was an ideal location for a single guy to lose himself. Joe had shown the mug shots in the only gin mill in the borough and the mom and pop stores on the one block business district, but not to the Garwood cops who wouldn’t piss on him if he was on fire. Hard feelings refused to die after Joe refused to drop DUI charges against a Garwood detective who had sideswiped four parked cars outside Westfield High during school hours. “Why didn’t he give you what you wanted?”

“He was a hard ass,” Jake said, throwing up his ham-hock size hands. “I guess deep down, I’m glad he didn’t. He was my *raison d’être* as the French say.” His eyes followed a top heavy brunet. “I assume you’ve got them.”

Joe nodded. “Amazing stuff. You’ve mentioned a few times.”

“Why in the world did you get involved?” Jake asked, pouring a splash of cream into the muddy brew.

“My father hammered into me that shit just doesn’t happen. Preston was bugged out of his mind for a reason, and I couldn’t resist finding out why.”

Jake’s neck descended into the turtleneck as he hunched his shoulders. “I waited damn near forty years to get my brother’s journals and that dried up old prune Ruth Ritchie hands them to you. Of all the weeks to take a cruise, I have to pick the one that they cleaned out his house.”

Holding his cup to his lips, Joe was astounded that Jake made no mention of Preston’s diaries. “You can have them.” He tossed his cup in the garbage. “Follow me home.”

“Too bad Alenia has gone to Florida with Harry,” Jake said with a sigh. “Some rack.”

Joe kept Jake’s ’85 Corolla in the rearview mirror. The old guy was a card— on the hood “Man of Steele” was painted in blue Gothic letters. The mini convoy crossed through Midowaskin Park and passed the cemetery on Broad Street. Jake may have looked half his age, but he drove like Joe’s father in his last years. He slowed the Volvo to 20 mph to keep the gap to a hundred yards, passing through the Wychwood gate to meander into Joe’s driveway.

Jake took a long look at the house under construction on the former Swedge lot. Snow and ice caused a complete secession of work leaving the 4,000 square foot monster half framed. “They should’ve kept the old girl,” Jake said as he negotiated Joe’s ice laden walk.

“It’s the Westfield disease. Tear ’em down and build ‘em bigger,” Joe said, firmly gripping the railing on the front steps.

Joe kicked fallen icicles off the threshold and unlocked the door. Roxy, waiting in the entranceway, gave Jake a wag of her tail. “Like old home week,” Joe said. “She’s normally wary of strangers until she gets to know them. How many times did you let yourself in?”

Jake ignored the question. “Why do still have him?” he asked. Preston’s face affixed to the top of the coat tree smiled from the dining room. Jake had circumvented the security system and searched the house on a half-dozen forays.

Roxy, drooling, stared at Jake’s pocket where a trove of treats had pacified the beast. “I ask again, how many times?” Joe said.

“You don’t want to know,” Jake replied, giving Roxy a piece of kibble.

“And all the time I thought it was mice trashing the place,” Joe quipped.

“I was respectful,” Jake said, sounding wounded. He followed Joe who walked into the kitchen and flipped on the light. It was 3:30, the sun was setting.

Joe removed a shoebox hidden in the rear of a corner cabinet. “While I’m getting the diaries, take a gander at these.” He placed the box on the kitchen table and disappeared down the basement steps.

Jake sorted through the box containing maps and other military paraphernalia found in Preston’s basement. He was holding the map detailing the route to the I. G. Farben plant dated 20 August 1944 when Joe returned. “The navigator on Paul’s plane had one like this?”

“All navigators at the mission briefing received one,” Jake said. “I had these in the wall behind the hot water heater if you’re wondering.” He handed Jake the diaries.

Recognizing Paul’s school composition books, Jake reverently caressed their covers. “What are these?” he asked, holding Preston’s leather bound journals.

Joe lit a Marlboro. “They’re Preston’s, covering the years ’38 to ’44, the same as your brother’s. I’m surprised you didn’t know about them.” He had just thrown four aces on the table. From the look on Jake’s face, the hand he was holding was a pair of deuces.

“If you don’t mind,” Jake said, his hands tremoring imperceptibly. He began to read.

“I’ve got a few things to do in my office.” Joe signaled for Roxy to follow. “Don’t steal the silverware.”

“Stainless crap,” Jake grunted. Roxy snuggled at his feet. “One heck of a watchdog. At least the Russian broad screamed.”

Joe settled at his desk, working on the required reading list for a course at Rutgers. A sob story written on Dr. Headcase’s letterhead aided his sweet talking an admissions counselor into reinstating him. The spring session would begin in a week.

Clicking of Roxy’s nails on the hardwood broke Joe’s concentration. Two hours had passed. Jake stood in the doorway, holding a can of ginger ale with the dog at his heels. He had removed the turtleneck. An athletic undershirt accentuated his chiseled upper body. “I helped myself.” Gone was his Ted Steele tough guy persona. “McCloy played us like a concert violinist handling a Stradivarius.” He sat on the couch, flexing his arthritic knees. “I was a naïve schmuck to think we could have outsmarted the powerbrokers. McCloy knew when we farted. Maybe the lips I thought were sealed, weren’t.” He threw up his hands. “Who knows?”

Roxy changed sides and sat in the cutout of the desk. "Playing with the big boys is and will always be rough." Joe shut down his computer. "Did you get an official explanation concerning Paul's death?"

"We received a note from his commanding officer about how Paul was such a great pilot and a credit to his country, and his wallet with a few personal effects. Nothing else. In Sing-Sing, I met Otto Schrup, the B-17 waist gunner who accused Vinnie of shooting down one of their own planes. Schrup was in the joint for a piddly confidence scheme. If a guy ever was a bullshitter, he was the ultimate.

"Schrup was in the upper layer of the formation. Smoke was coming out of two engines on Paul's plane, and he fell behind the rest of the group. One of the escort fighters followed Paul to provide defense against enemy attack. Clark Johnson flew that fighter and claimed a Messerschmitt came out of the sun, catching the *Brooklyn Avenger* with a burst of machine gun fire. Schrup swore there were no enemy fighters in the area. Without proof that Johnson was lying, the episode was swept under the rug." Jake was breathing hard. "In my wildest dreams, I never thought that he would get shot down by one of our own planes." Jake wiped his eyes with his undershirt. "You still have the Johnny Walker in the bottom drawer?"

Joe handed him the bottle of scotch. "Did Shep Peterson ever get in touch?"

"Sent a letter that clued me in on Paul's missing diaries," Jake said, pouring more than a tumbler into the near empty soda can. He took a long sip and placed a forearm over his eyes.

Joe removed a pack of cigarettes from the center desk drawer. Puffing on the Marlboro, he gave Jake time to compose himself. "Dave Cohen fed me nothing but bullshit."

"Nah, not all." Jake took another pull on the ginger ale scotch mixture. "He might have left out a few details, but the background was factual." A pained smile broke across his face. "I was sitting a table away and heard the entire conversation. Dave waited for my signal. We learned as much as we needed, and his leaving like he did, I figured would get into your head. We succeeded on all points."

"Sticking me with the bill was your idea?" Joe asked, taking the last puff on the cigarette down to the filter. He tossed the remains into the coffee can on the desk.

“Dave never needs to be coached on being a skinflint.” Jake poured two more fingers of scotch into the can. A ruddy complexion crossed his face.

Joe propped his leg on the desk. “What about your family? Dave left me hanging.”

Jake swirled the can, now one-hundred percent alcohol. “My father passed away right after Paul married Sarah. Alex was conceived in Florida, the last leg of Paul’s training mission before flying to Italy. Vinnie had the inside shake on their schedule, and I got Sarah a flight to the Sunshine state for nothing. My brother never had the chance to hold him. This is going to sound like a soap opera, but my mother was stricken with a heart attack when she read the telegram from the War Department. She didn’t last two months. Sarah and Alex lived with me in the Brooklyn apartment because her parent’s place was too small.”

Jake cleared his throat. “The Greenbaums didn’t own a car and took a bus to the Catskills for their summer vacation. The bus got creamed in an accident. Luckily, Alex was sick and Sarah didn’t make the trip. Her parents, aunt and uncle, and her cousin were crushed to death.”

“The gal you got off the *St. Louis*?”

“Yeah, Minnah the whiner. Sarah was left with no one but me. A couple of years later, she met and married an engineer who worked for General Electric and moved to Schenectady. Her last name is Blumberg. Sam died in 1972. A damn good man. He raised Alex as his own. Their daughter Phyllis is named for Paulie. My nephew became a physicist and works for NASA. Phyllis is a pediatrician. Both have two kids.” Melancholy had taken over his voice.

Joe scooted his chair to the bookcase and removed Winston Churchill’s *The Hinge Of Fate*. From the mid-section of the book, Joe plucked the two photos rescued from the scrum in Preston’s basement. “Alex?” He handed one of the photos to Jake.

“This is Alex’s bar mitzvah picture,” Jake said, bolting upright. “Where did the prick get this?”

“I don’t know.” Afraid of Jake’s reaction, Joe hesitated handing over the picture of the young girl. “Do you have an idea who this is?”

Jake held the photo at arms length. “It looks like Alex’s daughter who is a spitting image of his wife Rebecca.” He looked stone cold at Joe. “Is it possible?”

“I suppose it is. Preston’s daughter came cross country to attend Columbia. Where did Alex go to college?”

“You know the answer, Columbia.” Jake flipped the pictures onto Joe’s desk.

Joe raised an eyebrow. “What are the odds that Preston’s daughter would marry the son of the man he murdered?”

“I’m getting too old for shit like this.” Jake took the last slug left in the can. “Drive me home. I’m too blitzed to get behind the wheel.”

“When we’re finished,” Joe said, lighting a second cigarette. “Did Sarah ever learn the truth?”

“Paul died in combat like a bunch of guys who lived in the neighborhood.” Jake looked down at the floor. “I couldn’t bring myself to tell her the truth.”

“Among the papers I hauled out of his basement were canceled checks made out to the local temple and drawn for money orders. All were written at the time of the year when the Jewish high holidays fell. That in itself piqued my curiosity.”

Jake nodded his head indicating that Joe was on the right path. “Sarah began receiving checks in 1960. At first, I didn’t know why, but after putting two and two together, I figured that they were coming from Swedge. I told them my inquiries led down a dead end.” He drained the can. “It’s news to me that he was sending money to the temple. Just proves even a low life can have some sort of conscience.”

“How was it that you held Paul out for placement with the Fifteenth Air Force? The truth about Auschwitz didn’t break until June 1944. He had been in the air force since his graduation in 1942. That’s a long time to evade action.”

“Despite what the history books say, the Jewish political wing in the United States was in contact with the Jewish Committee operating out of Geneva. We received reports from all over Europe and knew about the deportations. The Nazis had a plan to make the soon to be dead seem like they were in re-settlement villages, making them mail postcards to their families still living in the ghettos. Having our people transferred to the 8th Air Force in England to bomb Germany cities would have proven nothing.” Jake’s head bobbed as he studied Joe’s Wall of Honor. “Impressive.”

“You should have received a few medals for what you did for the Israelis,” Joe said.

Jake, glassy-eyed, looked at Joe. “Where did you hear that?”

“I know a guy in the FBI. Your file is chockfull of running guns to Palestine while Preston was working for the State Department trying to stop the flow of supplies to the fledgling Jewish army.”

“Swedge’s name circulated among various Jewish groups working to break the British blockade. It was proposed to knock him off and make our job easier.”

“Why didn’t you?” Joe asked, repeatedly opening and closing the cover on his Zippo.

“Truman was leaning to support the creation of a Jewish state. If a representative of Uncle Sam was murdered, and the murder was traced back to an American Jew, Truman would have cut our legs off.” Jake stretched out on the couch. The scotch had hit with its maximum punch. “Why does it always come down to the same thing?”

“I don’t follow,” Joe said, reaching for the bottle of Johnny Walker.

“Don’t touch it,” Jake said, slurring his words. “I’m not finished killing my pain.” He drank from the bottle. “I’m referring to oil. It set policy then as it does today. People are willing to die sucking it from the ground, and many more are sacrificed to maintain the supply.” He closed his eyes.

Joe pried the bottle away from Jake. Holding the cap under his nose, he repeated the mantra, “My name is Joe and I’m an alcoholic.” He carried the bottle to the kitchen sink and poured it down the drain. “Son of a bitch.”

Chapter 43

WESTFIELD, NJ MARCH 2001

IT WAS 8:15 IN THE MORNING AND JAKE'S Corolla was in the detached garage set in the rear of the Garwood property on Spruce Avenue. Joe hadn't seen or heard from Jake for almost three weeks. In their last conversation The Man of Steele said reading the diaries had ripped out his heart and put him in a "mood." Joe lied when he told his new friend that he understood, wanting instead to smash him out of his funk. It wasn't as though the diaries dumped new information on Paul's death in his lap. It didn't take a PhD in clinical psych like Dr. Headcase to know what Jake's "mood" was about—for almost half a lifetime, Jake suppressed the fact that his plan for bombing the concentration camp had a snowball's chance in Hell to succeed.

"The senile old fool," Joe cursed as he began climbing an outside staircase. Repeated calls to Jake beginning at 6:00 went unanswered. His breath, steaming in the ten degree air, froze the hairs inside his nose. Winded, he paused on the second floor landing, looking up through the railing's balusters to his target on the floor above. Dragging his leg, Joe counted away the next fifteen steps. Stumbling on the last riser, he crashed against the railing of the third floor wrap around porch.

A weathered, peeling gray door snapped open the width of its safety chain. "Go away. I bought from the Avon lady last week."

"God damn it Jake, open the door," Joe said, wanting to shove the muzzle of his Glock into Jake's face. It was a scenario he fantasized over when he was hunting for the big man. "I've got verification of where Paul went down."

The door closed and then re-opened. Jake, in his black workout shorts and sweatshirt with the sleeves cutoff, barred the threshold with his arm. “What are you talking about?”

“It’s freezing,” Joe said, doing the limbo under Jake’s arm. He stepped inside. This was his first foray into the twenty by twenty apartment that originally was the garret of a one family built by the president of Garwood’s largest employer in the early 1900s. The residence was converted to a three family when Garwood Metal Fabrication went bankrupt during the Depression.

Joe stood in the center of the space. The galley kitchen’s two burner stove hadn’t been updated since the Hoover administration. Doubling as a dining table, a simple pine desk held a computer, a large blue ceramic mug, one box of saltine crackers, a jar of grape jelly, and a three-quarter empty bottle of Chivas Regal. Two pairs of dungarees were draped over the foot of a standard bed Joe thought to be too short for its owner. Flowing wood hippie beads suspended over an alcove next to the kitchen failed to hide the toilet and stall shower. The lone piece of self-indulgence was black leather recliner positioned at arms length from a 13-inch television atop a red plastic milk crate.

“Comfortable...,” Joe said. His eyes widened as he guestimated the number of books sagging makeshift floor to ceiling shelves surrounding the periphery of the room. The titles ranged from Greek and Roman history to Euclidian geometry. “A thousand?”

“Twelve hundred and sixty three to be exact,” Jake said without emotion.

“Paul considered you a Renaissance man, he wasn’t lying,” Joe said, unzipping his coat. If Jake was made of steel, his superstructure was rusting. The man, who looked half his age less than a month before, now looked haggard and spent.

“Reading is a habit I picked up in the joint,” Jake said, sitting on the edge of the bed. “Now what’s this business about Paul?”

“I’ve been trading e-mails with a Polish historian documenting crashes of American bombers on Polish soil,” Joe said, sitting on the recliner. “Mike Mulskawicz confirms the *Brooklyn Avenger* went down in a field twenty miles from Manowitz. The pastor of the local parish has the dog tags that were removed from the bodies. After the war, the Russians blocked all

attempts to forward the tags to American representatives and were placed in a hiding.”

“Americans are buried all over Europe. What’s your point? I’m too old to travel to the only country where the largest of the concentration camps could have been built with nary a word of protest. The Poles didn’t need any incentives to shove their Jews into the ovens.”

“It means that we could bring him back if you want.”

“Of course I would want him home,” Jake said, indignantly. “But how?”

“A colonel at the Pentagon assured me the Air Force will exhume the bodies and bring them back for DNA testing. After positive identification, Paul’s remains will be released.”

Jake powered up. “I’m hungry as a bear. Let’s go to breakfast.”

“I’ll have to take a rain check,” Joe said, “I’ve got a class at noon.”

Chapter 44

BROOKLYN, NY JULY 2002

“I DON’T KNOW WHERE WE’RE SUPPOSED TO BE,” Joe said to Kim Angreen, as he steered her Honda CRV through the narrow lanes of Mount Hebron Cemetery, the largest Jewish cemetery in New York City. Two-hundred thousand graves stretched as far as he could see. “This isn’t Westfield’s pastoral Fairview. It’s a tsunami of tombstones.”

Kim checked the card given out at the main entrance listing the location of the internment for Paul Rothstein. “Slow up,” she said, reading the address markers on the curb. “We’re looking for block 25, section D, line 9, grave 1. This is block 23. Keep going.”

Two hours of driving from Princeton to the borough of Queens had riled Joe’s nerves. Chewing a piece of Nicorette gum hadn’t cut into his urge for a cigarette since crossing the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. He wanted to jump out of his skin as they approached Coney Island in the Belt Parkway’s Brooklyn traffic. Lighting up in the “SUV for wimps” as he called Kim’s mini-truck was verboten.

“Funerals are still depressing even if the man of the hour has been dead for sixty-eight years. It’s times like this, a drink would be welcomed,” Joe said painfully. Six months of marriage had soothed the savage beast and kept him on the wagon. Exchanging cans of Bud for unsweetened ice tea translated to thirty pounds off the scale and four inches from his waistline.

Elaine served Joe with divorce papers three days after the World Trade Center was destroyed on September 11, 2001. Irreconcilable differences were the stated grounds. He instructed Mel Katz to make a deal with the plaintiff’s attorney, a hard nosed feminist lesbian from a powerhouse firm in Newark—split their assets including the proceeds from the sale of the

Wychwood colonial. Joe had one demand, he wanted his Explorer returned. The counter offer—three quarters of the bank accounts, half of his pension, three quarters of the house, and a new car—the desert was hard on vehicles—and by the way, Elaine was being magnanimous, he could keep his underwear.

“This must be the place,” he said, parking at the end of a line of vehicles. They would have to walk a hundred yards to the festivities. “I can’t believe this day has finally arrived.”

“I’m proud of what you’ve accomplished,” Kim said.

“I never imagined it would take so long to get him home.” What Joe thought would be a process of a few months, turned into a year and a half of frustration. While sympathetic, the Air Force dragged its collective feet, fearful of making re-interning WWII airmen a national obsession. “If it weren’t for Driscoll,” he winced, saying the special agent’s name, “nothing would’ve happened. The bastard is owed a lot of favors.”

The Polish Government was more than pleased to facilitate the paperwork after Driscoll’s contact in the Pentagon pushed the clearance for exhumations through channels. Jake located a cousin of Vinnie’s who supplied a blood sample to verify his remains. Finding next of kin for the other eight crewmen of the *Brooklyn Avenger* proved a daunting task for the Air Force.

It was necessary to walk on the graves closest to the road as another funeral procession made its way on the narrow lane. “I didn’t think you were going to make it,” Jake, in a short sleeve Hawaiian shirt, said, squeezing Joe about the shoulders. Bending over, he gave the diminutive Kim a kiss on the cheek.

“It took forever to get here from Princeton,” Joe said, rubbing his left arm where Jake applied his vice-like grip. After the sale of the Westfield colonial, Joe moved to Kim’s farmhouse in Princeton that had been in her family for three generations.

Ten elderly men huddled beneath the canopy erected over the grave, taking respite from the blazing sun. All but two were in sport clothes. Excavated earth was piled atop a blue tarpaulin spanning four adjacent plots. Jake called to a couple in conversation four headstones away, “Alex and Rebecca, I want you to meet Lieutenant Henderson and his wife Kim.”

He turned back to Joe and Kim. “Sarah is in the car, she needs the air conditioning. Phyllis is keeping her company.”

Joe felt sweat running down his back. Wearing a navy suit in ninety plus degrees made zero sense, but Kim’s “look” when he put on his white U.S. Open golf shirt and beige khakis persuaded the change. He couldn’t understand how the woman wasn’t melting in her demure, black tailored suit. From his jacket he snuck a peek at the photos of Alex and Rebecca. The man heading his way was the spitting image of Paul—thin, average height, and had his smile. Rebecca, a good four inches taller than her husband, moved haltingly toward Uncle Jake.

“We can’t thank you enough,” Alex said, pumping Joe’s hand. “My uncle sings your praises.”

“Your uncle exaggerates,” Joe said, jabbing Jake in the stomach. Rebecca offered a pained smile. Joe tried not to stare, searching for a resemblance for Preston. The nose was familiar, but...

Four uniformed cemetery workers blocked entry to within two hundred feet of the gravesite with yellow caution tape strung between metal rods pounded into the ground. Joe had enough experience with “wiseguys” to know that the muscle-men weren’t members of Local 365 of the Service Employees Union.

The funeral director signaled Jake. “It’s time,” Jake said, giving the thumbs up in return. “Alex, get your mother and Phyllis.”

Alex hustled off to a silver Lexus parked behind the hearse. “You knew my father,” Rebecca said with a dazed look. Without another word, she drifted away.

“She looks strung out,” Joe said, shaking his head.

“Am I missing something?” Kim asked sharply.

“I’ll explain later,” Joe answered. He removed his suit jacket, slinging it over his shoulder.

“When old wounds re-open...,” Jake started to explain. “Rebecca is a fine woman. She’ll need some time.”

Phyllis supported her mother as they painstakingly made the hundred feet journey to the grave. One of the elderly men waved to Jake. “That’s Sheldon Abramowitz, our rabbi,” Jake said. “The last chapter is about to be written.”

“I imagined him either an attorney or a labor organizer, not a rabbi,” Joe said with amusement.

“With the way he ran his mouth, I never thought he’d make it to the age of twenty-five,” Jake chuckled. “Working with the survivors of the death camps changed him. When he got out of the service, he made the decision to go into the rabbinate.” He walked toward the hearse where Alex and six of the geriatrics waited.

“Let’s get under the awning,” Joe said, moving to the Rothstein/Greenbaum family plot. Kim crunched close to her husband to avoid stepping on the final resting place of Sarah’s cousin Minnah.

Sarah, shorter than the five-two Kim, was bent over with a dowager’s hump. Joe helped ease her onto a metal folding chair. “It’s like a dream,” she said in a tired voice, running a hand through her simply coiffed gray, almost white, hair.

Joe kissed her hand. He received perfunctory nods of recognition from the other attendees. It wasn’t necessary to ask their connection to the deceased. They were Faction members. Canes and walkers were now their weapons. The unnamed man in the black suit turned, wearing the collar of a Catholic priest.

With the opening of the rear door of the hearse by the funeral director, Jake and Alex slid a plain pine casket out on the Cadillac’s rolling mechanism. The six pall bearers took hold of the traditional vessel for Orthodox Jewish burial. With nothing but bones, the octogenarians had little trouble carrying it to the gravesite and placing on the lowering device. Rabbi Abramowitz didn’t move.

Joe did a double take. A wood cross was affixed to the casket’s lid. Younger than the Faction members, the priest stepped to the grave. “*Non inters in iudicium servo tu.*” He cleared his throat. “May you deserve to escape the avenging judgment, who, whilst he lived, was marked with the seal of the holy trinity.

“O God, we humbly present our prayers to thee for the soul of Vincent Sapienza, beseeching thee not to deliver it into the hands of the enemy, nor to forget it for ever, but to command thy holy angels to receive it, and to bear it to paradise, that as it has believed and hoped in thee it may be delivered from the pains of hell and inherit eternal life through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

“Amen,” was said collectively.

“We are all soldiers of God,” he intoned, anointing the casket with Holy water. “All of us fight the good fight of life, and Vincent gave his life so others he didn’t know might survive.”

”The casket was lowered. Jake led the pall bearers back to the hearse. Sheldon Abramowitz shook hands with the priest. “Act two,” Joe whispered into Kim’s ear. “Jake is full of surprises. I can only imagine how he pulled off burying a Catholic in a Jewish cemetery.”

Jake and Alex inched the second pine casket to the edge of hearse’s bumper. Straightening their aged backs, the Faction brothers snapped to attention as Paul’s remains were delivered into their hands. The procession proceeded back to the gravesite, this time at a snail’s pace.

Sheldon began to chant, *“El maley rachamim shochen bam’romim hamtzey menuchah nechonah al kanfey haschechinah bema’alot kedoshim ute’horim kezohar harakia me’irim umazhirim lenishmat. Shehalach le’olamo ba’avur shekol beney hamishpachah, yedidim umakirim mitpalelim le’iluy nishmatobegan eden tehey menuchato lachen ba’al harachamim yastireyhubeseter kenafav le’olamim. Veyitzror bitzror hachayim et nismato. Adonai hu nachalato. Veyanuach beshalom al mishkavo venomar, amein.”*

“Amen,” Joe and the others answered.

“God full of mercy who dwells on high, grant perfect rest on the wings of your divine presence in the lofty heights of the holy and pure who shine as the brightness of the heavens, to the soul of Pinchas ben Avram who has gone to his eternal rest as all his family and friends pray for the elevation of his soul. His resting place shall be in the Garden of Eden. Therefore, the Master of mercy will care for him under the protection of his wings for all time and bind his soul in the bond of everlasting life. God is his inheritance and he will rest in peace and let us say, amen.”

Sheldon placed his hand on the casket. “Welcome home my friend.” Tears rolled down his face. *“Yeetgadal v’ yeetkodash sh’mey rabbah. B’almah dee v’rah kheer’utey. V’ yamleekh malkhutei, b’chahyeykhohn, uv’ yohmeykhohn. Uv’chahyei d’chohl beyt yisrael, ba’agalah u’veez’man kareev, v’eemru amein.”*

“Glorified and sanctified be God’s great name throughout the world which he has created according to his will. May he establish his kingdom in

your lifetime and during your days, and within the life of the entire house of Israel, speedily and soon, and say, amen.”

There was a muted response. The sound of noses being blown filled the air. The supporting straps were released. Paul’s casket slowly descended. A dull thud was heard as pine met pine. One by one, the Faction members dropped shovels of earth into the grave. Jake wrapped his arms around Joe. “We’re going back to the old neighborhood and have a bite at Katz’s.” He wiped his eyes. “We’ll be honored if you and Kim attend the last meeting of the Faction.”

Kim finished wiping her eyes with a tissue. “Let me have it,” Joe said, “Despite what they say, I’m human. I need to blow my nose.”

“Lieutenant Henderson, I want to apologize,” Dave Cohen said.

Joe wiped his nose, crumpled the tissue, and placed it in his pant pocket. “You owe me six and a quarter for the eggs and coffee.”

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LAWRENCE KAPLAN

HOUSE *of* GHOSTS



A JOE HENDERSON MYSTERY



